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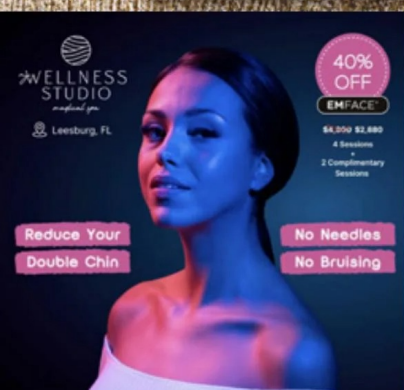


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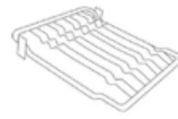
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MAR'25

V.21 × N.05

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Turn your house into a masterpiece with creative makeovers for every space.

STORY: AKERS EDITORIAL

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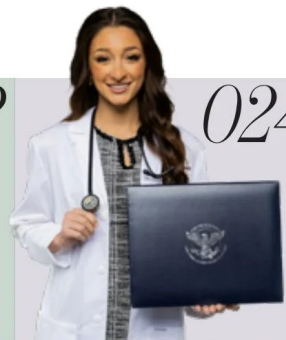
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Lake & Sumter Style

Design: Shawnee Coppola
Photo: Nicole Hamel
On the Cover: Realtor of the Year
Carolyn M. Maimone



Village Edition

Design: Shawnee Coppola
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Happy days

Celebrating community, homes and inspiration in Lake & Sumter.

Welcome to the March issue of **Lake and Sumter Style!** Whether you're buying, remodeling, or simply enjoying all that Lake and Sumter counties have to offer, this month's edition is packed with inspiration, practical advice and community highlights just for you.

First, we're thrilled to celebrate one of the outstanding figures in our local real estate scene. Meet Carolyn Maimone, the 2024 Realtor of the Year. Carolyn's dedication, unmatched market expertise, and talent for connecting clients with their dream homes have earned her this prestigious honor. In this issue, she shares what sets her apart—as well as invaluable advice for navigating today's competitive housing market.

If you've been curious about Buyer Brokers Compensation, we're here to clarify this critical aspect of the home-buying process. Whether you're a first-time buyer or seasoned investor, understanding how this works can help you make informed financial decisions. We've broken it down into simple, clear steps to empower you before your next transaction.

Not ready to move but eager to give your current home a refresh? We've got you covered there too. This month, we're exploring the top remodeling trends of 2024-'25. From luxurious spa-like bathrooms to sleek kitchen updates, these ideas will inspire you to enhance both the value and comfort of your home.

Of course, our homes are only one part of what makes our community special—it's the vibrant events and

shared experiences that truly bring us together. Don't miss this month's Food Truck Round-Up! With mouthwatering eats, live music and fun for the whole family, it's a must-read feature you'll like to sink your teeth into.

At **Lake and Sumter Style**, we take pride in celebrating the people, homes and ideas that make our community shine. We hope this month's issue leaves you feeling inspired and connected to the place you call home. Grab your copy today and join us in spotlighting all that makes Lake and Sumter extraordinary.

Until next month,

Kendra

Kendra



Have a story to tell?

We're always looking for stories about people who live and work in our area.
Send suggestions to editorial@akersmediagroup.com.

style

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An illustration at the top of the page shows two stylized figures, one in red and one in blue, climbing a large, textured mountain peak. The figure in red is on the left, reaching up, while the figure in blue is on the right, reaching down to assist. The background is a warm yellow-orange gradient with faint green concentric circles. The title 'Meet Our Social Workers' is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

Meet Our Social Workers

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Wendy Hall and Amy Roberts have served our community as onsite Licensed Clinical Social Workers ever since joining RBOI in 2011.

"It's our goal to meet every new patient as soon as possible," Wendy says. "I feel it's imperative that people help walk people through very stressful (and they can be catastrophic) times in their life. I also get calls from people that feel alone and haven't had a mammography for years, if at all. They don't have insurance and wonder what to do."

Wendy joined RBOI following 22 years at Hospice as a palliative care social worker. Becoming a certified oncology social worker was the natural next step. Her knowledge of support networks lets her match people in need to services. "I get referrals from social service agencies, from food banks," she says. "People talk to others about their circumstances.

They may say, 'I'm not able to work now because I'm in cancer treatment.' And somebody knows about us and will make contact."

Like Wendy, Amy Roberts meets with and counsels cancer patients and their families and caregivers. "I run support groups and help navigate through insurance and health systems and become an advocate on their behalf," she says. She directs people to practical resources that help with transportation and housing, and also teaches stress reduction techniques.

Amy conducts meditations and teaches mindfulness for health classes at RBOI. Years ago she had been a working single mom experiencing burnout. A social worker oncology talk taught her mindful techniques that she now shares with others. "Learning these little mental resources or these mindful ways to exist

amongst the chaos changed everything for me. That's why it's such a neat little hack that we can weave into every day that actually helps for your work relationships, your home relationships," she says.

Such strategies include taking walks outside, meditating in the car (even if only at a stoplight), eating healthy foods, keeping tokens of appreciation, reviewing impactful moments of the day, giving one's concerns to a higher power, and more.



How We Help

Some activities are ongoing, while others occur at different times during the year. Call us for more information.

- **Art of Aging**
(Marion Cultural Alliance)
- **Breast cancer educational group**
(RBOI Lecanto)
- **Cancer Alliance of Marion County**
- **Cancer Resource Room**
- **C.L.I.M.B.**
(Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery)
- **Citrus Aid Cancer Foundation**

by the numbers

1983-1984

Formation of the National Association of Oncology Social Workers

more than 1,200

Oncology social workers in the U.S.

2013

Citrus Aid Cancer Foundation is established, with Wendy Hall as a founding board member

2019

Amy Roberts receives Lane Adams Award for her work in improving quality of life in people dealing with cancer



- **General Cancer Educational and Support Group**
(RBOI Lecanto)
- **Guided Meditation**
- **H.U.G.S. Charities of Marion County**
- **Living Strong after Cancer**
(YMCA Lecanto, Ocala)
- **Look Good Feel Better**
- **Mindfulness for Health class**
(Lecanto, Ocala, The Villages)
- **Mindfulness and Cancer Group**
(The Villages; must complete Mindfulness for Health class)
- **Nature Coast Cancer Crusaders**
- **Shop Talk**
(lunch lectures at CCF Ocala)
- **Stop Smoking Class**
(Lecanto)
- **Tuesday Meditations for RBOI Cancer Patients**
- **We Can Weekend**
- **Women's Cancer Group**
(Ocala, Timber Ridge)

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GROWING LEGACY: In celebration of Florida Arbor Day, the Ocklawaha Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) donated a crape myrtle tree to the City of Eustis, which was planted on the grounds of the historic Clifford House. This donation honors the Chapter's long-standing connection to the house, starting with early member Lottie Clifford Taylor. Arbor Day, founded by Julius Sterling Morton in 1872, promotes the benefits of trees and encourages planting and care. Florida celebrates this observance on the third Friday of January, recognizing the importance of trees in reducing air pollution, conserving energy, and beautifying the state, while also protecting its natural balance by planting native species.

BLOOMS AND BREWS: Stroll downtown Leesburg at noon on March 22 for Blooms and Brews! Enjoy samples from local businesses and receive a complimentary flower from each participating location!

501 W. Meadow St., Leesburg. Sponsored by Downtown Leesburg Special Events. specialevents@leesburgflorida.com



FROM THE HARP: It's no surprise that St. Patrick's Day is a big deal around these parts since the Irish diaspora in Florida dates back to the 1500s and has left a lasting mark on the state's history. Early Irish settlers were part of the Spanish garrison in the 1560s, with Irish priests and soldiers serving the Spanish Crown. Father Richard Arthur, a parish priest in St. Augustine, established America's first public school before 1606. During the Great Famine (1845–1852), waves of Irish immigrants arrived, seeking escape from economic hardship and social upheaval caused by English colonization. They sought land ownership and religious freedom, contributing significantly to Florida's growth in agriculture, education and governance. Today, their legacy lives on in Florida's cultural fabric. St. Patty's Day falls on March 17.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG: Celebrate the season of renewal starting March 20 (or any other day!) with a visit to one of two Lanier's Produce locations. Stock up on fresh, locally grown fruits and veggies bursting with color and flavor—perfect for crafting beautiful, light spring dishes. While you're there, pick up some delicious jams, homemade

pies, local honey and more. For additional information, call owners Josie at 352.267.0452 or Kevin at 352.267.0454.

SUNSHINE STATE OF PLAY: March Madness has become a national obsession, and Florida has its fair share of representation.

- The University of Florida has appeared in 24 NCAA Tournaments, with 48 wins and 22 losses. The Gators won back-to-back national championships in 2006 and 2007.
- Florida State participated in the NCAA Tournament 18 times with 23 wins and 18 losses. The Seminoles finished as runner-up in 1972.
- The University of Miami reached the NCAA Tournament 11 times with 11 wins and 11 losses and a Final Four appearance in 2023.

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SPRING FORWARD:

Daylight saving time, also referred to as daylight saving, daylight savings time, or daylight time, is the practice of advancing clocks to make better use of the longer daylight available during summer so that darkness falls at a later time. This year it will take place on March 9 and last until November 2.



THE MARCH TO STATEHOOD: Florida became the 27th state on March 3, 1845 while James K. Polk was President of the United States. William Dunn Moseley was Florida's first governor. Approximately 66,000 people inhabited the state, and the three major crops were citrus, cotton and sugar.



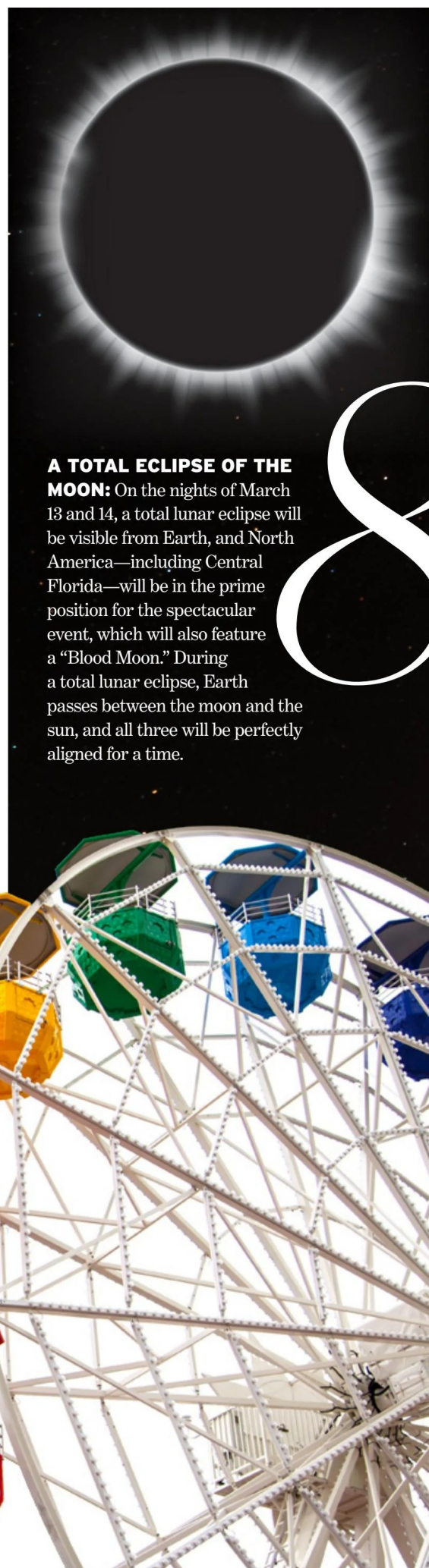
PIG TALES: The annual Pig on the Pond Community Festival will be held March 28-30 at Waterfront Park in Clermont. Pig on the Pond is the largest annual event in south Lake County, drawing 20,000+ attendance. The festival includes a carnival, live entertainment, a kids zone and fireworks, in addition to dozens of sponsored activities. The family-friendly festival, hosted by Project Scholars raises funds for college scholarships.

FUN FOR ALL: Families have until March 9 to experience the thrill of the 2025 Sumter County Fair in Bushnell! This action-packed event promises a full carnival midway brimming with exciting rides for all ages, classic midway games, and mouthwatering fair food. Plus, enjoy an incredible lineup of entertainment, from live concerts and strolling performers to an exciting array of competitive events and exhibits. 🎡

SUMTER COUNTY FAIR

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A TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE

MOON: On the nights of March 13 and 14, a total lunar eclipse will be visible from Earth, and North America—including Central Florida—will be in the prime position for the spectacular event, which will also feature a “Blood Moon.” During a total lunar eclipse, Earth passes between the moon and the sun, and all three will be perfectly aligned for a time.



PEOPLE

Elizabeth Johnson

Friend-raising a priority for new Education Foundation leader.

STORY AND PHOTO: CINDY PETERSON

VITAL STATS

- Education Foundation of Lake County Executive Director
- Former Interim Program Director at LSSC
- Former Associate Director of the Office of First Year Experience at UCF
- PhD in Educational Leadership



My dream job: While in college, I quickly learned how important education can be in creating change and opportunities. That realization led me to pursue a master's degree in college affairs administration from the University of Georgia, which prepared me to work in higher education. When I saw the position open for the Education Foundation, I knew it was the right fit. It allows me to fulfill my passion for education while serving the community. The foundation bridges the gap between the school system and the community, advocating for resources and opportunities for students and teachers. That mission aligns perfectly with my personal and professional goals.

Thinking big: Signature events like the Renaissance Faire are great examples of how we create opportunities for students across different disciplines, from culinary

programs to construction academies. My goal is to build on these programs, making them even more impactful while evaluating ways to better manage resources and scale what works. For the Take Stock in Children program, I'm excited to explore how we can grow the mentor base and maintain connections with students after graduation.

Future goals: My focus is on meeting the evolving needs of students and teachers in Lake County. With the area growing rapidly, we need to think strategically about how to scale our efforts and continue to provide meaningful support. I also want to ensure that we're leveraging new technologies, like AI, and responding to changes in the education landscape. Raising awareness about our work and building community partnerships are also top priorities.

Community help: Friend-raising is just as important as fundraising. Sharing our work on social media, volunteering at events like Apple Mart, and supporting our programs financially are all great ways to help. Funds make the miracles happen, but having champions in the community to spread the word is invaluable.

I want to be known for: Advocacy and for taking the foundation to the next level. My focus is on expanding our impact, ensuring that we meet the needs of our students and teachers, and continuing the incredible legacy built before me. It's about building on the strong foundation we already have and creating new opportunities for growth and innovation. 📧

Know a person of interest? Tell us! → Email your recommendation to cindy@akersmediagroup.com.



CINDY PETERSON



Top Left to Bottom Right:

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Thomas A. Barnard, MD; Jaya B. Kumar, MD, FASRS; Nisarg P. Joshi, MD;
Elias C. Mavrofrides, MD; and Matthew A. Cunningham, MD, FASRS.

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PEOPLE

MEAGANN GOODRIDGE

Serving others inspires Villages Charter grad's nursing career.

STORY: CINDY PETERSON × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

**VITAL STATS**

- 19 years old
- Junior at Florida State University
- Former Miss Leesburg 2021-'22
- Former Competitive Baton Twirler
- Former Miss Florida Hometown USA

My greatest

Accomplishment: I was recently awarded The Lifetime Presidential Award from Florida's Hometown USA in November 2024 for having over 4,000 hours of community service. I was also a competitive baton twirler from the time I was in elementary school and won many state, national and international titles.

I want everyone to know

that: I understand what hard work means, both physically and mentally. Without a little hard work of their own, most people do not have a true appreciation of things.

A saying I live by: Always stay true to yourself yet be open to learn.

My greatest quality: I believe that my greatest quality is my self-determination. Without this aspect you depend on others, and I just feel that being able to motivate and push yourself is very important in life.

Future goals: To graduate from Florida State University

College of Nursing as a registered nurse in December of this year then to start my career as a trauma nurse.

My role models: I admire and look up to my parents. They have shown me what self-respect, dedication and determination sincerely mean—to never let anything stand in the way of your goals and to also always stay true to yourself! Life may not always be easy, and things may not always go your way but with self-respect, dedication and determination, nothing is impossible.

Top of my playlist: I listen to all types of music depending on my mood at the time. I think my all-time favorite song would be Vienna by Billy Joel.

I'm passionate about:

Giving back to the community, as it has shown me so much in life while being involved. Also, I enjoy meeting new people, and with being involved in our community, I have had the opportunity to meet so many and make new friends. 🌟

Know an outstanding student? Fill us in!

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CINDY PETERSON



Make the Most of Your Doctor-Patient Relationship

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Patients play a big role in getting more out of their doctor visits, and Dr. Kumaran Mohan urges patients to be their own best advocate. A board-certified family medicine specialist, Kumaran Mohan, MD, joined Orlando Health Medical Group FHV Health in August 2024 and brings 46 years of total experience to his position.

Having a better doctor-patient relationship will lead to better health outcomes, so Dr. Mohan encourages patients to ask questions and voice all their concerns during the appointment.

He says it's important to bring all your medications with you whenever you see your physician, including any specialists. This includes over-the-counter meds, vitamins and supplements. That's because polypharmacy (being on multiple medications) is common.

"Many people are on duplicate medications. Sometimes they don't even know why they are taking these different medications. You need to discuss this with your doctor so any duplicates can be eliminated," says Dr. Mohan. He emphasizes that the goal

is to cut back on medication whenever possible, especially when the patient is prescribed multiple drugs for the same condition.

"There are concerns about low sodium due to various medications and conditions. Very low sodium levels can cause confusion and falls in the elderly. Discuss this concern with your doctor," he advises.

Being honest with your doctor allows him or her to do a better job of treating you. For example, if you drink or smoke, don't hide that fact.

"I'm finding that alcohol use has increased, sometimes to dangerous levels. It's a general trend," says Dr. Mohan. "I'd rather my patients not drink at all, but please discuss this with your doctor."

Dr. Mohan routinely sees seniors and always encourages his patients to speak up about any concerns—not just about health issues.

"Discuss living wills with your doctor. Be proactive about your wishes. When people lose a partner, it can affect their health," he says.

Dr. Mohan counsels his patients to have power of attorney, banking, and finances sorted out ahead of time. This helps the surviving spouse better navigate the loss and their financial

situation without excessive stress, anxiety and depression that can worsen existing health problems.



DR. KUMARAN MOHAN
BOARD-CERTIFIED FAMILY
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2024
REALTOR
OF THE
YEAR

*Carolyn M.
Maimone,*
REALTOR®

CHARTING *her* COURSE

A passion for real estate, community and helping others keeps Carolyn M. Maimone moving forward.

STORY: CYNTHIA MCFARLAND × PHOTOS: NICOLE HAMEL



One of the most remarkable things about the world of real estate is how it draws people from extremely different backgrounds and areas of expertise. Individuals who didn't originally plan on getting into the field often become some of the most successful agents.

Carolyn M. Maimone is a perfect example. The broker associate with Fierce Realty was recently recognized as 2024 REALTOR® of the Year by the REALTORS® Association of Lake and Sumter Counties (RALSC).

Just to be nominated is an honor, but being chosen as REALTOR® of the Year adds gravitas to the winner's resumé. The recipient is chosen by a panel and the award announced at the RALSC annual awards gala in January.

"It's an honor celebrated at the local, state and national levels within

the REALTOR® community. Success breeds success and this accolade reflects a member's hard work, passion and perseverance," says RALSC CEO Steve McDonald.

"This prestigious honor recognizes Carolyn's dedication, professionalism and passion for serving clients and colleagues alike. This recognition is well-deserved, and I celebrate her remarkable achievements," he adds.

Carolyn has consistently been one of the area's top producers since becoming a member of the Multi-Million Dollar Club in 2016. She was also voted 2024 Best of the Best REALTOR® by **Lake and Sumter Style** readers.

Carolyn holds the following designations: GRI (Graduate, REALTOR® Institute); ABR (Accredited Buyer's Representative); SRS (Seller Representative Specialist); AHWD (At Home with Diversity); C2Ex (Commitment to Excellence);

and CMLx (Certified Multiple Listing Executive).

Home grown

Carolyn has called Lake County home her entire life and lives in Eustis. She's certainly made her mark in real estate, but she didn't start out dreaming of that career.

She studied graphic design at Lake-Sumter State College after graduating from Eustis High School and found a job as a graphic designer but soon switched her focus to accounting. Carolyn spent the next two decades working in accounting and information technology as a software programmer, database administrator, software troubleshooter and IT manager.

After 22 years, she realized that if she was going to work such long hours, she might as well do it for herself, so in 2007, she opened her own business doing bookkeeping and web design for small local businesses.

Her business had been up and running for a year when her mom, Loretta Maimone, proposed a new direction for her skills.

"In 2008, she hired me to be the office manager of her real estate firm," recalls Carolyn.

That was her introduction to the world of real estate. In short time, she realized it only made sense to get her own license so she could help show properties. When Loretta closed her brokerage, Carolyn went out on her own as a REALTOR®.

From 2012 to 2015, she took a job in another aspect of the housing world when she worked as CEO of the Home Builders Association of Lake-Sumter (HBA-LS).

As much as she enjoyed that position, Carolyn missed working in real estate and went back to it full time. She got her broker's license in 2019, and she's worked with Sean DeCoster

of Fierce Realty ever since. Her office is in Eustis and serves Lake and Sumter counties, while the home office is located in Kissimmee.

Carolyn found that her skills in the technology field transferred seamlessly to real estate when it came to marketing and promoting properties.

But the driving force behind her career as a REALTOR® has always been the opportunity to use her expertise to help others.

"I am a doer and a fixer, so it really jazzes me up to be able to find a house for somebody, answer their questions and help them find what they don't even know they need," she says. "Ninety percent of my business has been referral and people don't refer you unless they're happy with their experience with you."

Carolyn has specialized in waterfront homes—and with good reason. It's been an integral part of her own life.

"I've lived on the water a long time and boated on the Chain of Lakes since childhood," she says. "When someone wants to live on the water, I can guide them to which lake and area is best for what they want to do. Whether you're a fisherman, or just boating for entertaining or skiing, whatever your reason for wanting to live on the water, I can help you navigate to find that perfect lake for your lifestyle."

Community involvement

Steve McDonald points out that the application for

REALTOR® of the Year seeks to highlight nominees' involvement at the local, state and national association levels, demonstrate their commitment to professional development and showcase their dedication to community service.

Carolyn believes that being active in her community is non-negotiable. She can't imagine not being involved and giving back to the place she calls home.

She is a member of both the Eustis and Tavares Chambers of Commerce and served on the Tavares chamber board of directors. She served 10 years on the Board of Trustees for the Lake County Water Authority, which was an elected position at that time. She serves on several non-profit boards, including the board of directors for the Lake County Museum of Art.

Carolyn volunteers regularly for the Amazing Race for Charity. She's also volunteered with Leadership Lake County, New Vision for Independence, LEASH, Lake County Animal Services, and enjoys being a member of the Eustis Elks Club.

"I feel like when you give, you always get something back in return, I don't do it for the accolades. I do it for the joy of volunteering," says Carolyn, who recently organized her 40th high school reunion.

"I think giving back to your community is very important and there are so many ways you can do it," she says. "Pick something you like to do and go volunteer. Getting out and meeting people is never a bad thing."

"I think giving back to your community is very important and there are so many ways you can do it."

— CAROLYN M. MAIMONE



When people know and trust you, they will want to do business with you.”

Practical advice

With her own success and years of experience, Carolyn has solid advice for anyone contemplating a career in real estate.

“Get a very good mentor,” she advises, adding that her first mentor was her mom. “You want to work side by side with someone who is successful and knows how to navigate all the craziness that is real estate. No two transactions are alike, even if you have the same customers, each time will be different.”

She also urges anyone getting into the field to take advantage of the many educational, mentoring and networking opportunities at their local REALTORS® Association.

“Get on a committee or get involved in some way; it’s invaluable,” she suggests. “I’ve always felt you should get involved and donate some of your time to whatever industry in which you work.”

Carolyn takes her own advice to heart. She served on the board of RALSC for six years and was president of the association in 2023. She has served on and chaired the Public Policy Committee for over 10 years, as well as serving on the Finance and Grievance Committee several times. She also serves on the Stellar MLS board of directors.

Moving forward

Times have certainly changed since Carolyn first dipped her toes into the world of real estate.

“When I got my license, it was short sales and foreclosures,” she remembers. “Then we moved into the boom market and now we’re where the market is leveling off to normal. Interest rates are still an issue for some people. If they come down a couple points, I predict the market will probably start going crazy again.”

Carolyn is a widow now. Her late husband, David Hatmaker, a local home inspector who was well known and loved in the community, passed in October 2022.

This year she entered into a new chapter of life when she was hired as Chief Deputy for the Lake County Property Appraiser.

“With all the experience I have with IT, accounting, leadership, politics and networking, plus

having lived here all my life, it’s a perfect fit,” she says.

Her peers in the local real estate world wish Carolyn success in her new role but would consider it a blessing should she ever put on her REALTOR® hat again. 🎩



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D I F F E R E N C E

Makers

RALSC Members Add Value to their Community Through Volunteering.

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

When it comes to making an impact, real estate is about more than buying and selling. Members of the REALTORS® Association of Lake and Sumter Counties (RALSC) go above and beyond to impact their communities. It's all about recognizing and meeting needs.

"We have about 2,800 members and the majority live in Lake and Sumter counties, so this is our home, and we want to be known for giving back. The community doesn't realize a lot of the things members do behind the scenes," says Vivienne Cunningham, RALSC president and a REALTOR® for 17 years.

"It's not just about selling houses; it's a whole package. It's about helping people—whether it's referring them to someone or lending a hand yourself," notes Vivienne. "Sometimes it's building a home for Habitat for Humanity. Sometimes it's painting a house, picking up trash, building a fence, or helping with storm clean-up."

"As REALTORS®, our impact extends beyond real estate. We are dedicated to strengthening the communities we serve. Throughout the year, we have championed initiatives that uplift families, support local organizations, and create meaningful change," says Steve McDonald, CEO of RALSC.

RALSC MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN NUMEROUS VOLUNTEER PARTNERSHIPS TO BETTER THEIR COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING:

- Habitat for Humanity builds
- UF Health Streetlight Program
- Spread the Love PBJ Drive
- Collecting 450 lbs. of cereal for Lake Cares Food Pantry
- Collecting 825 lbs. of school supplies for Red for Ed
- Removing over 80 lbs. of trash from local waterways
- \$1,200 contribution to Great Clermont Cancer Foundation
- \$1,200 contribution to Mid Florida Homeless Coalition
- \$1,200 contribution to Ashley's House Project

Local businesses play important roles and often donate to RALSC members' projects.

Some members teach financial literacy in local high schools, helping 11th and 12th graders learn practical life skills about handling finances.

"There is value in volunteering, and we show our value by giving back," says Vivienne, who finds that clients

Steve McDonald,
RALSC CEO

Vivienne Cunningham,
RALSC PRESIDENT

often check social media to see how real estate agents are involved.

"The power of giving back can make your business double because people get to know you and it builds trust. If people know you, they'll use you," she says.

"REALTORS® do more than facilitate homeownership," adds Steve. "We foster hope, security, and opportunity. Through continued outreach and collaboration, we will keep making a difference, one initiative at a time."

This approach defines the REALTOR® slogan: "That's Who We R!"

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My 2024 Stats

AGENT RANKING

#44 OUT OF 2,052 AGENTS

CLOSED SALES

79

DOLLAR VOLUME

\$14,000,000

AVERAGE DAYS ON MARKET

61

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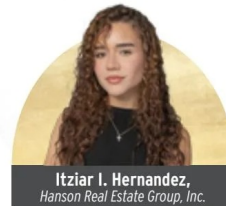
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Jaime and Company Real Estate**Jaime and Company Real Estate**

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Lorie Ann GullianChad Erron Clark
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Kyle Rattray
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Rodelie Tirone-Winters
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Brantley Wheeler
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Rosemary Theresa Siegler
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Kacey Bradshaw
Kathy Garner Simpson
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LoKation

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Dustin Lee Hansen
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Scott Strem
Lynn Haynes
Lindsay Madison Sanders
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BHHS Florida Realty

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Gerardo Camacho, Jr.
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Rachael Segarra

Fierce Realty

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Flamingo Real Estate & Management

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Gallery Properties International

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GATAP Realty

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Gerald Anthony Dietrich

Gerald A. Dietrich

Grizzard Commercial Real Estate

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Amy Spivey

Hancock Realty Group

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Harrison Real Property Group

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Lyndin Wasson
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Martha Rivera Hoffman

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Charlene Degroot

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Cynthia Griffin
Brian Martin
Mathew Decker
Bobbie Robinson
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Robert Strickland

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Lisa G. Wolfinger
Mary DeAnnuntis

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Lisa Sconyers

Patterson Realty

Janice Louise Patterson

Pileggi Real Estate Group

Teresa Pileggi

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Anamaria Marquez
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Manuel James James Gonzalez
Ronald Sato
Stephanie Williams
William Kenneth Perry

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RCR Real Estate, LLC

Dorothy Mizowek

RE/MAX Central Realty

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RE/MAX Foxfire - Lady Lake

Donna Joi Moody
Gary Arnold

RE/MAX Freedom

Maria Anne Hatch

RE/MAX Premier Realty

Makayla Neighbors
Marsha Kay Goff
Pedro D. Rufino
Pamella Craycraft
Jack Wayne Boyd
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Gene W. Lewis
Darlene Williams
Marilyn June Fletcher
Raquel Uribe
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Michael Joseph Young

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Gretchen Sullivan
Theresa Marie Steck

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Scott Lepper

Real Living Real Estate Solutions

William Kolb

Realteam Realty, Inc.

Teresa Thomas

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Melissa Mann

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Jennifer Raby
Ruth Jean Puckett
Michelle Elizabeth Wohl
Lisa Esposito

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Sunbelt Home Realty, Inc.

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The Florida Property Shop Sale

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Kenneth Joseph Riehm
Joseph Saunders

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Jodi F. Nelson

Denise R. Beyer
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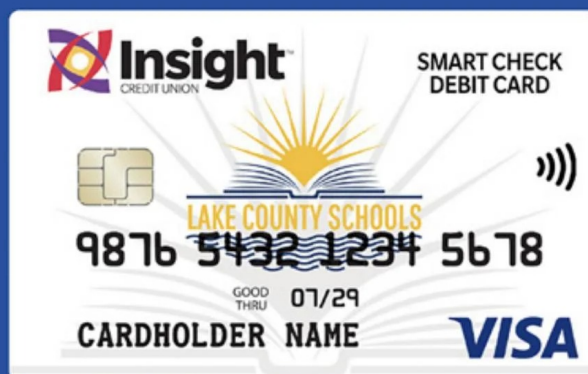
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Brooke

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“Moving is one of the biggest decisions you make in life. Whether you’re a buyer or seller, being part of that process is truly an honor,” says Brooke Vermeulen, Realtor® with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Realty.

Brooke works with Florida residents who are relocating, as well as transplants to the Sunshine State.

“I go above and beyond to make things easier for them and take a lot of pride in this. Being a local, I know the neighborhoods and area well,” she says. “I approach things differently; I get ahead of possible issues and find solutions. Things don’t always go as planned, but my goal is to make things as seamless as possible.”

“I’m a people person and I’ve always loved sales, so real estate is the perfect combination.”

Recently honored as “2024 Rookie of the Year” by the REALTORS® Association of Lake and Sumter Counties, Brooke was also voted runner-up for the prestigious “Best of the Best” Realtor award for **Lake and Sumter Style Magazine**, all after her first year in real estate. Making her mark, she produced over an astounding \$3.8 million in sales and

earned the coveted designation of Luxury Collection Specialist. Brooke is in the top 14 percent of Berkshire Hathaway agents nationwide and was recently inducted into their Honors Society.

“I’m a people person and I’ve always loved sales, so real estate is the perfect combination,” she says.

A Florida native, Brooke lives in Mount Dora and has called Lake County home since 1991. She graduated from the University of Central Florida with a Bachelors degree, specializing in communication.

Today, her real estate clients benefit from her professionalism and attention to detail. Buyers and sellers both rave about the fact that she’s always available to answer questions and address their concerns, which makes the whole process as stress-free as possible.

If Brooke looks familiar, you might have seen her on television as one of the bachelorettes on ABC’s “The Bachelor” in 2003, or when she and her family competed on “Family Feud” in 2011. Those experiences made fun memories, but her focus now is on her daughters and her business.

When she’s not working, Brooke is busy with her girls—Brynn, 10, Campbell, 16, and Christa, 17—who all compete in junior rodeo.

“When I’m not working, I enjoy my time with my girls,” she says, adding that this includes her Goldendoodle, “Presley.”

“I truly love my job!” says Brooke. “I have the opportunity to connect with people, understand their needs and make a real difference for them.”

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**BERKSHIRE
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HOMESERVICES

Results matter. Whether in a sporting competition or guiding someone to find that just-right home, Azael Kayser has always focused on the end result. Helping buyers and sellers reach their goals is his greatest reward.

Originally from Panama, Azael, “AZ” for short, has called Central Florida home since 2009. He lives in Orlando, but Leesburg is his second permanent home. He knows the area like the back of his hand and delights in sharing it with others. He covers all of Central Florida and recently sold a lakefront community in Leesburg.

Azael is a Florida real estate licensee who holds multiple certifications and designations (SRS, ABR, CIPS, GRI, etc.) from The National Association of REALTORS®. He holds a mortgage loan officer license, CAM license, and is a Florida Real Estate Instructor. Recognized as a Top Producer, he’s a member of the Million Dollar Club with the Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association (ORRA).

Azael bought his first home when he was 23 years old and has been a real estate agent in Florida since 2020. He has great expertise in new construction and relocation. Since he’s part of a military family, he truly enjoys working with veterans, whether relocating from out-of-state, or within Florida.

“New construction should be headache-free, especially for first-time home buyers,” says Azael, who prepares buyers for what’s coming next to avoid

surprises. “The process can be overwhelming to first-time home buyers. I help them through it so it’s a good experience. Knowledge is power. I love to help families; that’s what I find rewarding.”

With a master’s degree in Sports and Exercise, Azael formerly competed in swimming and triathlon but now uses his competitive edge for buyers and sellers. Customers find his extensive knowledge of real estate reassuring. Because he fully understands the industry, he’s able to answer their questions and explain each step of the process, from contract to closing.

His sellers verify that he lives by the slogan, “Every day until it’s sold!” Azael promises, “Your home will be marketed and promoted—not just listed—every day until it’s sold.”

Father to a daughter who’s starting college this year, Azael is committed to helping Leesburg and Lake County continue to grow. He serves on the board of directors for the Leesburg Chamber of Commerce and with the City of Leesburg. He also volunteers with the American Red Cross Armed Forces Disaster Action Team.

Azael

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Martha

RIDGWAY

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customer service.



From Big Sky country to the Sunshine State, Martha Ridgway's real estate expertise is wide ranging. The Montana native was a Realtor® and contractor who built single family homes before relocating to Florida in 2017.

The scenery may be different, but what didn't change was Martha's hands-on approach and start-to-finish personal connection with buyers and sellers.

"Start to finish means everything from listing to marketing, showing and closing. I don't pass off my customers in the middle of a transaction," she notes.

When Martha Ridgway joined Coldwell Banker Vanguard Edge Realty as a partner last year, she brought over 24 years of real estate experience to the position.

Her dedication led to increased production. Over the past year she earned titles such as Top Lister, Top Producer, and Million Dollar Club member within the firm.

"I was recently appointed as the Central Florida Global Luxury Ambassador for the Coldwell Banker Vanguard Edge (Tavares) and Lifestyle (The Villages) offices. This position involves educating and expanding the Global Luxury listings in Central Florida," says Martha.

But Martha doesn't only sell luxury homes. Her business focuses on The Villages, but she

also sells in the surrounding area. Even with the current interest rates, Martha exceeded her numbers this past year and anticipates doing the same in 2025.

"As a Partner, I have an invested interest in the firm," she notes. "I help monitor and watch the firm grow in production and quality of service. Our firm provides comprehensive services, including listing and selling both residential and commercial. Coldwell Banker Vanguard has a property management company that is full service and offered across Central Florida."

When customers come to the office, they discover that although the atmosphere is modern and professional, the service is relational and personalized.

"We are completely full service, and our office atmosphere caters to our customers. We'll bring you something from the in-office coffee bar and then we can settle in one of the private rooms with a big screen tv and computer to begin exploring your needs and offer our services," says Martha.

She understands that not every customer wants to look up details on their computer or phone, so she makes sure they receive paper copies throughout the transaction.

"I believe in old fashioned customer service. It makes a difference," she says simply.



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One thing is certain. If Nan Robinson is helping you buy or sell a home, you're in good hands--and you're going to end up laughing at some point. If anyone can make real estate a fun adventure, Nan can.

A founding Realtor® with Coldwell Banker Vanguard Lifestyle Realty, Nan focuses on The Villages and surrounding areas. Her outgoing personality, compassion and life experience make her perfectly suited for her second career in real estate.

An Arkansas native, Nan moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, at age 20 and began working in the medical field. She put in 40 years as a hospital administrator and was managing 17 clinics when she retired in 2005.

Nan's sister lived in The Villages and when Nan came to help her after a hospital stay in 2017, she fell in love with the area. She and her husband Everett were driving back to Oklahoma, and by the time they hit the Florida-Georgia line, he said, "Let's move here!"

Barely a year later, they settled into their home in the Village of La Reynalda in the Spanish Springs area of The Villages.

"I had taken my real estate course back in Oklahoma because I always thought I would love it. I wasn't wrong.

I should have been doing this my whole life," says Nan. "I love the look on someone's face when they walk into a house and realize it's their house. That's why I do this."

Thanks to being one of their top producers she's now a junior partner for the Coldwell Banker Vanguard Lifestyle office in The Villages.

With her designations SRES (Senior Real Estate Specialist) and MRP (Military Relocation Professional), certified with the National Association of REALTORS®, she's well-equipped to help seniors and veterans achieve home ownership.

Nan is known for her honesty and work ethic, but she loves to make people laugh, so expect to enjoy yourself if you're looking at homes with her.

"I treat you like a friend, not a client. I will do for you what I'd do for my best friend," she says.

Nan has a Yesteryear golf cart she named "Betsy," but in 2023, she finally got her dream car, a hard-top convertible Miata she christened "Dolly." Although most of her business is in The Villages, she loves to drive and works anywhere in the state.

Nan

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Everyone appreciates a two-for-one. Double the expertise is exactly what customers get when they call Right Realty Connection in Leesburg.

"When you hire one of us, you get both of us," says Bethany Burge-Bosbous of the brokerage she owns with husband Joe Bosbous.

Joe and Bethany are both multi-million-dollar producers who thrive on helping customers find the property of their dreams.

The husband-and-wife team has owned the brokerage together since 2021. Bethany has been active in real estate since 1998, having owned two flipping companies and a real estate rental company. She holds multiple designations

from the National Association of REALTORS®, including ABR, CRB, MRP, C2EX and

SRES. She is also a RPAC major investor. Bethany is proud to be a Ramsey Trusted® Pro. She's thoroughly vetted by the Dave Ramsey Organization. She truly cares about how her customers spend their money and likes sharing tax advantage tips.

Joe served in the Coast Guard almost 7 years and then worked as a Lieutenant for the Federal Bureau

of Prisons. He has 33 years of government service. His veteran background and service mentality is a huge plus to customers.

"When Joe retired from the BOP, I said, 'You're too young to be a kept man, so I've signed you up for real estate school; you start on Monday!' Joe became a Realtor® in October 2021, and we've been working together since," says Bethany.

The couple lives on Lake Harris, so if they're not working, they're usually spending time on the water.

"We've taken many clients out on our boat to show homes. Nothing sells a waterfront property like arriving by boat," says Joe.

Bethany happily describes herself as a "pit bull with lipstick," and says, "We don't stop until we find you the property you want."

"We treat people right because it's the right thing to do," she adds.

"People never know about the hiccups or the fires we put out to make the transaction smooth," says Bethany. "I love it when our customers say at the closing table that their home purchase was the easiest they have ever experienced. We believe everyone deserves a home, and we love seeing the pride of home ownership on our customers' faces. We will sell anything from a single wide mobile home to multi-million-dollar homes."

"We're a five-star rated brokerage. We go above and beyond to care for our customers," says Joe.

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Kimberly

COOK

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“I’ve always been a service-oriented person, whether in the Navy, working for the government or through real estate.”

Every person is the sum of their experiences. Savvy individuals take all those life lessons and apply them to future endeavors.

That’s exactly what Kimberly Cook has done, and her real estate clients are reaping the rewards.

The Maryland native’s first stay in Florida was when she attended Navy bootcamp in Orlando in the late 1980s. After serving her country, she moved to Central Florida in 1992.

Kimberly earned her bachelors degree in aviation management, worked in the airline industry and then took an administrative position with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. She was a literary coordinator and taught inmates at Coleman Federal Prison for almost 25 years.

Her unlikely introduction to the world of real estate occurred when her home was condemned and taken for a road widening project via eminent domain.

“I finished my course to get my license on the day the country went into Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020,” says Kimberly, who hasn’t slowed down since.

“After I retired from the federal government, I realized I don’t sit still well, so was looking for something productive to do to help people,” says Kimberly. “I’ve always been a service-oriented person, whether in the

Navy, working for the government or through real estate. The best part of being a Realtor® is helping people find what they’re looking for.”

Working in the prison system honed her communication skills and taught patience, both of which come in handy today. Clients appreciate how she guides them through the process. Her ability to explain each step is especially valuable for first time home buyers.

“Each transaction is unique, from the customers you’re working with to the actual transaction,” says Kimberly, who handles as many vacant land contracts as residential home sales.

She holds the designations At Home With Diversity®, Graduate, REALTOR® Institute, Military Relocation Professional, and takes pride in helping fellow veterans.

Kimberly lives in Lake County on the Minneola Chain of Lakes with her husband, Rusty. Their children, Dylan and Lea,

are grown. When not working, she’s often on the water. If she’s not boating, she’s probably doing cross stitch, working a puzzle, or reading a great book.

She has her black belt in martial arts and teaches a safety class for members of the REALTORS® Association of Lake and Sumter Counties.



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BUYER'S *Market*

Negotiating Florida's evolving real estate scene.

STORY: CYNTHIA MCFARLAND × PHOTOS: PROVIDED

There's no question the pandemic and lockdowns throttled the world's economy and negatively impacted many industries across the United States. The Sunshine State real estate market, however, experienced a major boost.

Florida's population grew by over 1.5 million people from 2020 to 2024, and many of those were homebuyers, including Florida

residents, transplants from other states and international buyers.

Florida's real estate market was a seller's dream during 2020 and into 2022—high demand and not enough inventory to meet it. Properties routinely had multiple offers—often over the asking price—and many sold without the buyer even touring the home in person.

Florida home values skyrocketed approximately 80% over the past five years. At the end of 2024, the median price for a single-family home was \$411,000, down from

a Sunshine State all-time high of \$430,000 in April 2024.

STABILIZATION AND GROWTH

Positive trends in the Florida market are expected to continue, but not at the frenetic pace we saw during the pandemic and immediately afterwards.

People tend to forget that in the 1980s, interest rates soared as high as 18.63%, which makes the current high rate of 7.79% seem almost reasonable.

People remember that rates were as low as 2.65% as recently

as January 2021. Although the Fed finally dropped mortgage rates last year, they're still hovering around 7%. Rates are predicted to gradually decline in 2025 if inflation eases as anticipated.

Florida's current housing market reflects both stabilization and growth. Inventory has increased to the point that by December 2024, there was a 4.8-month supply of single-family homes. This means there are enough houses on the market to satisfy current demand for nearly five months.

The tide has shifted. Buyers have more options to choose from, which can mean more negotiating power.

"It's a buyer's market now. Properties are sitting on the market a little longer compared to the last two years when there were multiple offers and people buying sight unseen. Prices are a little more realistic now and buyers are more able to afford them," notes Vivienne Cunningham, a realtor for

17 years who works with Preferred Real Estate Brokers and is current president of the REALTORS® Association of Lake and Sumter Counties (RALSC).

"It's a great market for buyers. A lot of people complain about the interest rate being high, but I say, 'Date the rate; marry the house.' You can buy it now and then refinance when the rate comes down," Vivienne says.

Because it's taking longer, on average, for homes to sell, she says it's crucial for sellers to price their homes realistically.

Vivienne explains that the listing agent does a market analysis of homes sold in the area, and provides this information to the seller, who then makes the final decision regarding the listing price.

"Sellers usually think their house is worth more than it is and think a buyer will just negotiate, but buyers will walk and find

another property if they think it's priced too high," she adds.

SELLER AND BUYER AGENTS

A residential real estate transaction usually includes two real estate professionals—one for the seller, one for the buyer.

The seller works with a listing agent/broker who will represent them and is responsible for marketing and listing the

"A buyer's agent can and should discuss compensation with a client or customer"

— STEVE MCDONALD,
CEO OF RALSC



property. They negotiate the commission to be paid upon sale of the home. If the commission is to be split between the listing agent and the buyer's broker (a common arrangement), this is stated in the agreement. Both the listing agent and seller sign that agreement.

The buyer is represented by a buyer's agent/broker.

Florida prohibits dual agency, which is when a real estate agent represents both the buyer and seller in a property transaction. Why? Because dual agency can create a conflict of interest.

"However, Florida does allow an agent to serve as a transaction broker or single agent. With a transaction broker relationship, the agent works for the transaction, not the buyer or seller," notes RALSC CEO Steve McDonald.

"Consequently, the agent in this relationship remains a neutral party. In a single agency relationship, the agent represents only one party in a transaction. Additionally, a Florida agent should always confirm with their principal broker as to company policy on these issues," he clarifies.

COMPENSATION

To ensure a smooth transaction, both buyers and sellers should understand exactly how real estate agents are compensated for their work.

Real estate agents are independent contractors who are typically paid by commission rather than salary. Commissions are deducted from sale proceeds and distributed by the escrow company handling the transaction.

"Commissions can vary by state or company because commissions are, and always have been, negotiable. Commissions and compensation to an agent are all negotiable. There is no standard commission," Steve explains.

Although there is no standard commission, it can start as low as 1%, depending on what the seller and listing agent negotiate and agree on.

Compensation can be shared between the listing agent and the buyer's agent, but the commission split can vary. The precise terms of compensation are detailed in the listing agreement. If a seller doesn't want to offer compensation to the

buyer's agent, then the buyer is responsible for that commission.

"Any compensation provided will be listed on the settlement statement and a check will be made to the brokerage to disperse," Steve says.

What happens if a home doesn't sell, or the seller changes their mind?

PEOPLE OFTEN DON'T REALIZE THE EXPENSES A LISTING AGENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR, INCLUDING:

- Photography
- Marketing
- Staging
- Miscellaneous expenses, such as lawn and pool service, if owner is out of state or unable to address them

"Listing agents pay all these expenses out of their pocket until they get reimbursed. These expenses are a separate fee or can be negotiated in the commission. Everything is negotiable between the seller and their listing agent," says Vivienne, adding that these details are agreed upon and specified in the listing agreement.





ATTENTION FIRST TIME *Home Buyers!*

Investing a few hours can save you thousands. Realtor Vivienne Cunningham encourages people to take the first-time home buyer's course offered by Housing & Education Alliance, Inc. The eight-hour course is available online or in person. There are specific state and county incentives to help first-time home buyers, as well as

those who haven't owned a home in three years. "There's a lot of money out there for first-time buyers. The majority can get into a house with just \$2,000 if their credit score is at least 640," says Vivienne, who teaches the course.

Call Vivienne at 321.231.8487 to learn how to sign up.

"Every decision, from location to timing, impacts your lifestyle, wealth and happiness for years to come."

— VIVIENNE
CUNNINGHAM

Steve points out that sellers may pay for marketing or other expenses the agent and seller agreed to if a seller takes their home off the market before the listing period ends.

BUYER BROKER AGREEMENT

Following a \$418 million class action lawsuit last year, the National Association of Realtors agreed to new rules regarding agent compensation. In keeping with the new regulations, compensation is no longer visible on the Multiple Listing Service. Buyer agents must now have a written agreement with buyers to ensure transparency of fees and costs.

This Buyer Broker Agreement (BBA) must be signed up front whenever an agent offers services to a buyer. Those services may include lining up potential properties, arranging home tours, negotiating and presenting offers on the buyer's behalf. (A BBA doesn't apply to open houses.)

While the listing agreement states the agreed upon commission that the seller pays, the BBA specifies any commission the buyer will pay to the buyer's broker.

Vivienne believes the rule changes clarify things for buyers.

"I see this as a change for the good. Many other states were already doing this, so now Florida is doing it and it's nationwide," Vivienne says. "Now it's transparent and the seller signs an addendum saying the commission is split between the listing broker and buyer's broker."

The updated BBA is meant to add transparency with agents' roles and commissions clearly specified.

"In the past, sellers paid all commission, not the buyers. Now a buyer can pay as well and it has to be transparent where it's coming from," Vivienne says. "This doesn't happen often, but it could happen if a property had lots of interest, and

a buyer could say they'd pay the commission in order to get it."

"A buyer's agent can and should discuss compensation with a client or customer," notes Steve.

One thing is certain: Florida's real estate market isn't going back to how things were pre-2020. The more information buyers can access ahead of time, the more likely they are to find the property of their dreams.

"Buying or selling a home isn't just about today—it's about shaping your future," Vivienne says. "Every decision, from location to timing, impacts your lifestyle, wealth and happiness for years to come. Think beyond price tags and trends. Consider the life you're building. A home isn't just an investment; it's where memories are made, and dreams are nurtured. The right time to move? When your future demands it." 🏠



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Kevco Builders has been named Best of the Best Homebuilder every year since the award's inception and just recently took home multiple awards at the Lake-Sumter HBA Parade of Homes including first place. Our commitment to excellence continues to set the standard for custom homebuilding in the region.



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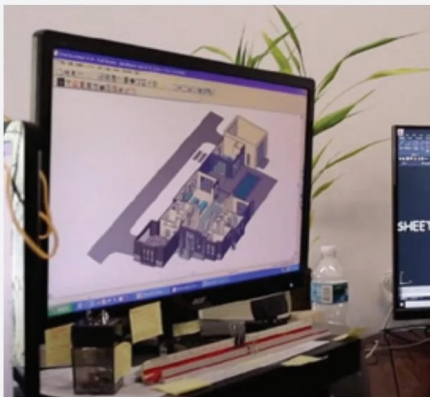


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Choosing the perfect location for your custom home is just as important as the design itself. Factors like utility access, zoning regulations, and future growth can all impact your investment. If you don't already own land, Kevco's dedicated team can help you find the ideal homesite and guide you through the real estate process, ensuring a seamless experience.



3. | **CUSTOM IS NOT JUST CHOOSING A FLOOR PLAN**

Some builders offer a limited set of "customizable" plans—but true customization means designing a home around your unique vision. As the area's only true custom builder, Kevco creates homes that are tailored to your lifestyle. Our in-house design team works with you to craft every detail to fit your needs.

HOME SWEET-ER HOME

Expert tips for taking your abode to the next level.

**STORY: ROXANNE BROWN, GINA HORAN,
CYNTHIA MCFARLAND AND CINDY PETERSON
PHOTOS: PROVIDED**

Whether you're looking to enhance your living space or completely transform your home, remodeling offers endless possibilities.

From stylish home decor and cutting-edge electronics to perfect lighting that sets the mood, the right updates can breathe new life into any room. Whether upgrading your kitchen with sleek appliances, reimagining your bathroom with spa-like features or creating the ultimate man cave or she shed, the expert advice in this guide will help bring your vision to life.

We consulted top professionals experienced in various aspects of home remodeling—inside and out—for tips on where to start and what to look for, in addition to the latest trends and advice on choosing top-notch contractors.

These expert insights will help you navigate the remodeling process and ensure you're making informed decisions for every space in your home, from selecting the perfect materials for exterior painting to considering the best pool designs for your backyard oasis.



DESIGNED BY HUMBLE ABODE INTERIORS
WWW.HUMBLEABODEINTERIORS.COM



BATHROOMS

When it comes to remodels and updating, bathrooms are one of the most common rooms to address. Take heart! You don't have to gut the room and completely start over to enjoy a major change.

As with any home remodeling project, start with your budget. Decide if you're keeping the current layout and remember that moving plumbing or walls can have a big impact on cost.

New flooring is often on the wish list, but don't cut corners on installation.

"When done correctly, flooring in the bathroom should run under the cabinetry. It's not recommended to put new material on top of existing tile or flooring," says Crystal Hernandez, owner and lead interior designer of Crystal Design Co. in Mount Dora.

"If you're on a budget and need to redo the floor in an old bathroom, buy a prefab vanity, which is half the cost of custom cabinetry," advises Crystal, who says that big box stores have surprisingly good options for ready-made vanities with sink and hardware included.

"Bathrooms are confined spaces and don't have to match the rest of the house, so you can add character," says Crystal. *"The powder room, especially, is a place where you can really get creative with interior design, like a rich color, unique stone, or patterned wallpaper on the walls, which can completely transform a space."*

Solid, textured wallpaper is an upgrade that feels more luxurious than just repainting a wall.

If your bathroom only has overhead lighting, add sconces to flank mirrors or install a large vanity light above the main mirror.

Crystal points out that every room—not just bathrooms—should have multiple lighting sources. *"You should have enough secondary lighting and natural light that you don't always have to turn on overhead lights,"* she notes.

If you don't have gorgeous wood cabinets, but they're in good shape, painting them is another way to totally change the look of a bathroom without incurring huge expense.



DESIGNED BY HUMBLE ABODE INTERIORS
WWW.HUMBLEABODEINTERIORS.COM

IF YOU'RE JUST LOOKING TO

Refresh THE SPACE, YOU CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE BY:

➤ *Installing a
new countertop*

➤ *Replacing or
adding mirrors*

➤ *Painting the
whole bathroom*

➤ *Replacing hardware
(mixed metal finishes are popular)*

➤ *Updating
light fixtures*

➤ *Hanging fun
wallpaper*



KITCHENS

You may opt for total renovation if your kitchen is too small or doesn't meet your needs. If your kitchen is functional, you can just refresh it with material changes.

A refresh or remodel is all about bringing new life into a space. And focusing on a few areas can make a dramatic impact.

Always start with a budget. But be forewarned, expect to spend double or triple if it's been 10 or more years since your last renovation or refresh.

But there is a silver lining.

"While the trades have gotten more expensive—along with everything

else—the skill level is now more advanced," Crystal says. *"In the end, you're getting something more creative, especially when it comes to cabinetry, lighting and materiality."*

IF YOU CAN ONLY AFFORD TO CHANGE THREE THINGS, GIVE YOUR KITCHEN A FRESH NEW LOOK BY REPLACING:

- Countertops
- Hardware
- Light fixtures

When a kitchen has quality wood cabinetry, Crystal prefers

not to paint it, but to change out other finishes.

"Rich wood tones are in style and trending, but changing countertops by adding a beautiful marble or quartz makes a huge difference," she notes.

Swap out all the hardware, including knobs and pulls, faucets and light fixtures.

"Don't be afraid to mix metals. It's okay to match stainless with bronze, and to introduce linen, leather and woven textures in the light fixtures," Crystal advises. *"This gives a home character, as opposed to being all one finish, which feels 'builder grade.'"*



Latest Trends

Tips for testing paint colors in your home:

- > Warm wood tones
 - > Bold, moody colors, including jewel tones
 - > Mixed metals on hardware, lighting, fixtures
 - > Stone countertops (like quartz or marble)
 - > Backsplash same as countertop material extended up the wall
 - > Ceramic tile
 - > Texture
 - > Maximalism
 - > Gorgeous wallpaper
- > Test in different lighting conditions
 - > Compare against furniture & cabinets
 - > Consider undertones
 - > Test with different sheens (matte, satin, eggshell or gloss)
 - > Don't rush—live with it for a few days



"The all-white kitchen is totally yesterday," Crystal says. "People are starting to lean into what makes them feel good in design, whether that's color or unique furnishings. The whole point of interior design is to make you feel inspired—anything but bored."

Don't fill every space. Be intentional about the art pieces you display. It's okay to have a blank wall.

CRYSTAL HERNANDEZ

www.crystaldesignco.com

hello@crystaldesignco.com



DESIGNED BY HUMBLE ABODE INTERIORS
WWW.HUMBLEABODEINTERIORS.COM

HOME DÉCOR

Transforming your home with beautiful, functional decor can feel overwhelming, but interior designer Tiffany Whitley of Humble Abode Interiors breaks it down into simple, actionable steps.

"It's about creating a palette and finding a balance that reflects their personality and complements the surroundings," Tiffany says.

Whether you're embarking on a full remodel or refreshing a single room, here's how to approach your project with confidence.

VISION: Before you begin, think about the purpose of the space and the vibe you want to create. Gather inspiration through photos, magazines and Pinterest boards to clarify your goals. This foundation will ensure a cohesive result and help guide your choices in colors, furniture and décor.

BUDGET: Establishing a budget starts with prioritizing which areas

need the most attention. Research material and labor costs and consider consulting a reliable contractor to avoid surprises. Being prepared can save time and money down the road. Even without a big budget, you can make meaningful changes. A fresh coat of paint, decluttering and rearranging furniture can refresh a space. Repurpose existing items to give them new life or reorganize for a polished and inviting look.

ESSENTIALS FOR KEY AREAS:

For living rooms, invest in layered lighting with dimmers, comfortable seating, cozy textiles and natural elements like plants and wooden accents. Add personal touches, such as unique artwork or décor. For smaller bedrooms, use mirrors to create the illusion of space and maximize storage with multi-functional furniture or organized closets. Keep designs simple to prevent overcrowding.

PAINT: Consider lighting, room orientation and the mood of colors when selecting paint. Warm tones can brighten a north-facing room, while cooler tones work well in sunny, south-facing spaces. Test samples in the room before making a final decision.

TIPS: Look beyond big-box stores for decor. Visit local shops, antique shows and unique galleries to discover pieces that resonate with your personality. A home should be a reflection of who you are, so select items that bring joy and inspire you daily. *"Create a home that is not only beautiful but also functional and uniquely yours,"* Tiffany says. *"Take your time, trust the process and enjoy the transformation."*

TIFFANY WHITLEY
HUMBLE ABODE INTERIORS

352.408.3415 / www.humbleabodeinteriors.com
Tiffany@humbleabodeinteriors.com



LIGHTING *and* ELECTRONICS

The latest trends in home lighting focus on energy efficiency, versatility and a return to natural aesthetics with emerging technologies.

On the design side, glass lighting provides versatility, and you can find everything from sleek and minimalist designs to warm, inviting styles that feel right at home in a cozy space. And if you love a touch of nature, materials like wicker, seagrass and bamboo are making their way into lighting, blending texture and craftsmanship for an artisanal vibe.

Layered lighting combines ambient, task and accent lighting so designers are creating spaces that feel dynamic and personalized. Oversized fixtures, recessed lighting and cozy lamps are all part of the trend. Perfect for indoor/outdoor or above the breakfast nook is the Fandelier. It's exactly what it sounds like—a fan and chandelier in one, offering beautiful light and a cool breeze.

For tech, OLEDs are flexible, energy-efficient lights that emit a soft, natural glow and can be molded into creative shapes that are perfect for modern homes or anyone who likes a little flair in their fixtures. Adaptive

lighting systems (which are getting smarter by the day) use built-in sensors to adjust brightness and color temperature based on the time of day or whether anyone's in the room.

"Remember, lighting begins with practicality," says Robert Wydler, a veteran lighting specialist at Besco Lighting in Leesburg who stresses the importance of timeless basics. *"A bulb replacement can be done by anyone, whereas a complicated system has to be repaired by an expert."*

He says that the modern light bulb has come so far that brightness can be altered in up to four stages.

Robert emphasizes the importance of placing light in the right spot in every room. *"Every room should feature three sources of light: task lighting for specific activities, ambient lighting for overall illumination and accent lighting to highlight décor."*

Robert also suggests advanced technologies like color-changing temperature (CCT) LED bulbs and home automation systems such as Lutron's Caséta Pico Kit.

"Home automation is the future, and the technology is here to help," Robert says.

BESCO ELECTRIC SUPPLY

711 S. 14th St., Leesburg, FL
www.bescolights.com



POOLS

When it comes to turning a backyard into a personal oasis, a pool can be a game-changer. Shawn Wiseman, owner of Wiseman Pools since 2007, has spent nearly two decades helping homeowners create their dream outdoor spaces. Whether building new pools or remodeling existing ones, Wiseman's advice ensures clients avoid costly mistakes.

What to look for in a pool company

"Make sure they're a licensed and insured contractor in the state of Florida," Shawn emphasizes. "You might come across independent plaster guys, but they may not be licensed to handle the job."

He advises homeowners to confirm there's enough space for a pool and to research permitting requirements and HOA rules before starting a pool project.

"HOAs or even cities can have restrictions, like setbacks or fencing bans," Shawn notes.

Trends and features for 2025

Shawn says modern pools are evolving with exciting features.

"Glass tile for the waterline is becoming popular," says Shawn, who says that the tiles draw inspiration from mosaic designs seen in kitchens, bathrooms and backsplashes.

LED lighting offering energy efficiency and customizable colors controlled via smartphone apps or pool control systems is another must-have.

For remodels, many homeowners are replacing standard concrete decks with luxurious finishes like travertine or marble overlays. Other

popular additions include sun shelves—shallow ledges perfect for lounge chairs and umbrellas—and sleek sheet waterfalls that add visual appeal without requiring extensive modifications.

"Adding these features is easier if it's a new pool, but even during a remodel, they're achievable with proper planning," Shawn explains.

And since pools are becoming hubs for outdoor entertainment, you may want to accessorize with summer kitchens and outdoor televisions.

"People want to relax, cook and entertain around their pool," Shawn says.

Practical Considerations

Shawn stresses the importance of planning for maintenance and safety.

"About 95% of pools we build now are screened in," he says. *"Screens keep debris, bugs and animals out and satisfy Florida's code for barriers. Where screens aren't an option, code-compliant fencing is needed."*

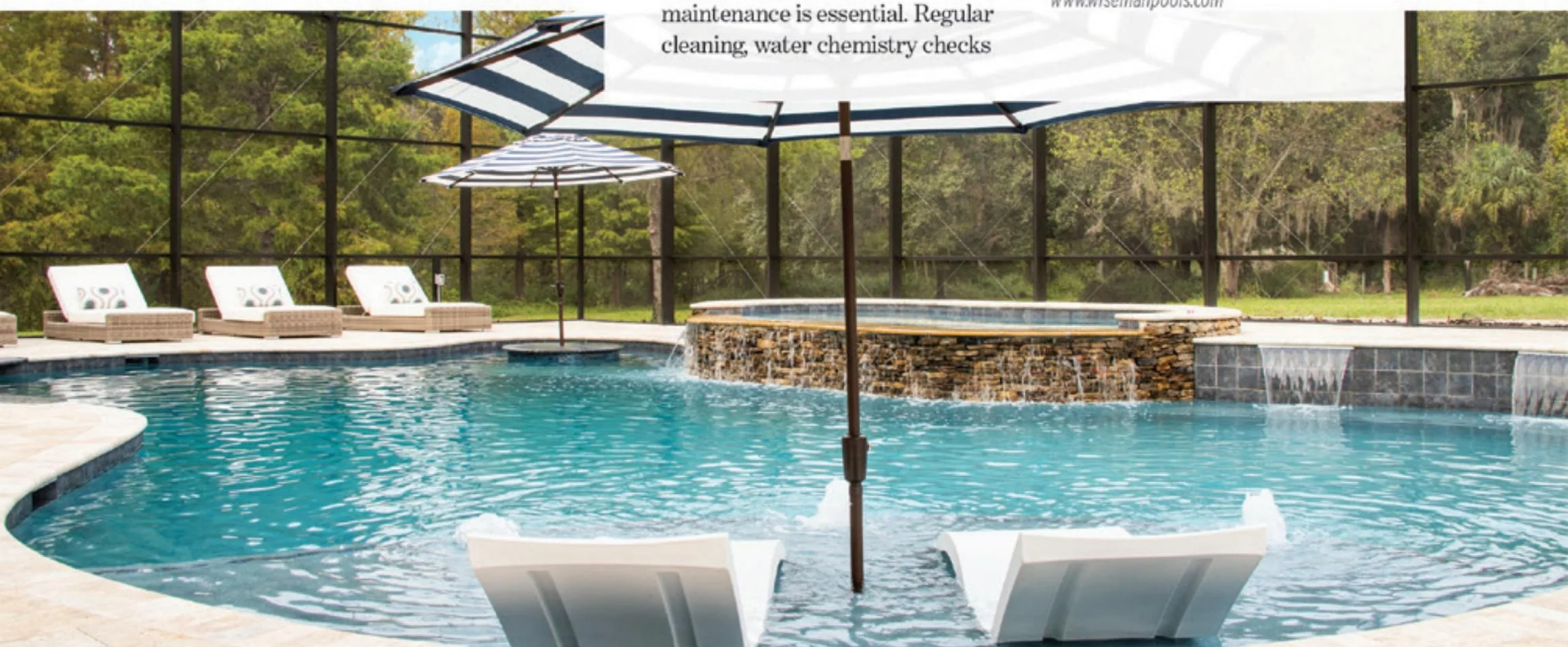
And since pools can be a significant investment, ongoing maintenance is essential. Regular cleaning, water chemistry checks

and equipment maintenance can extend the life of a pool.

"A pool is a long-term investment, and just like any asset, it requires care," Shawn advises. *"Neglecting maintenance can lead to costly repairs or replacements."*

WISEMAN POOLS

1517 W. Main St., Leesburg / 352.491.3766
www.wisemanpools.com





EXTERIOR PAINT



Painting the exterior of your home is more than a cosmetic upgrade—it's an investment in longevity and value. According to Omar Contreras of Omar's Painting Inc., headquartered in Lady Lake, homeowners should prioritize the highest quality products and craftsmanship over cost, if possible.

Omar emphasizes the importance of choosing durable, weather-resistant paints such as Sherwin-Williams Duration or Emerald lines.

"We always use top-of-the-line products from Sherwin-Williams. They're one of the top brands, and I highly suggest two coats. It comes with a warranty and it's like you're investing in your home's future," Omar says.

He adds that homes with contractor-grade paints typically used in new construction may require repainting sooner—around

two to five years—because lower-quality paints often become chalky and dry much sooner than better quality paints.

"It's better to spend more upfront and avoid repainting every few years," Omar says. *"Quality paint can last 10 to 12 years, making it worth the investment."*

Before repainting, Omar advises keeping an eye out for signs of wear, such as cracking, fading and chalkiness.

"When you start to notice any of these signs, it's about time to repaint; so, try not to wait, just do it," Omar says. *"Sometimes people say, 'Oh no, I can wait another year or two,' but waiting can make the condition of your house worse and harder to work with."*

Omar suggests entrusting the paint job to licensed and insured professionals who prioritize preparation. Omar's team ensures

surfaces are clean by pressure washing, addressing cracks, re-caulking windows and removing obstructions like downspouts and mulch before applying paint.

"I treat every house I paint as if it were my own," Omar says.

He adds that when searching for a painter, you should read reviews, check their records, make sure they're licensed and insured and trust your gut when it comes to who you click with and who seems trustworthy.

For a modern touch, neutral tones like grays and beiges are currently trending. To enhance curb appeal, consider adding darker accents to shutters or the front door for a rich, polished look.

OMAR'S PAINTING INC.
40108 Orange Cir., Lady Lake / 352.434.7072
www.omarspaintinginc.com

PERSONAL SPACES

In today's busy world, personalized retreats like she sheds and man caves are more popular than ever, and for good reason. Beyond being trendy, these spaces offer tangible psychological and lifestyle benefits which make them an essential part of modern home design and home improvement for many.

She sheds and man caves are more than just cool places to chill. Research shows that having a dedicated space as a sanctuary for relaxation or a hobby can reduce stress, improve mental health and spark creativity.

She sheds often serve as tranquil spaces for yoga, crafting or quiet reflection and can become reading nooks, home offices or workout spaces.

Traditional man caves tend to cater to indulgence with gaming set-ups, mini bars and/or sports memorabilia and may feature pool tables, dartboards or home theaters.

Some couples are even merging the two into “*we-sheds*,” shared retreats for relaxation and connection.

These retreats aren't just about comfort. They can also add value to your property. A well-designed space that complements your home

boosts curb appeal and attracts potential buyers.

Creating the perfect addition may require planning, so working with a professional is important if you plan to go beyond basic décor and DIY design via the nearest home improvement store or hobby shop.

“Check zoning regulations and ensure the structure meets codes,” advises Nick Smith, owner of Trident Construction in Eustis. *“Insulation and other functional elements are critical before tackling the fun stuff like décor and finishes.”*

Nick, who emphasizes starting with the basics, has noticed a





growing trend of homeowners incorporating these spaces into multi-generational living setups. So versatility is critical for alternative uses.

"We're seeing younger couples planning for their parents' future needs," he says. "Adding a unit as a way to prepare for a parent as they age is becoming more and more popular. People can also use these spaces for kids returning from college who may need a spot to land before they go out on their own."

Whether it's a backyard shed, refurbished garage or a basement cave, these retreats are all about creating functional yet personal spaces that bring balance and joy to our hectic lives. 🚫

To contact Nick at Trident Construction in Eustis: nick@tridentconstruct.com

Nick is also the President of the Lake and Sumter County Home Builders Association.





PICTURED BELOW: LAKE GLASS & MIRROR RESIDENTIAL TEAM

LAKE GLASS & MIRROR INC.

CLEAR QUALITY, TIMELESS SERVICE SINCE 1983

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

In a fast-changing world, some things like exceptional craftsmanship and dedicated customer service should remain constant. Since 1983, Lake Glass & Mirror has upheld these values, delivering quality glass solutions with a personal touch.

A Legacy of Excellence

When Richard and Glenda Boliek purchased Lake Glass & Mirror more than four decades ago, they set out to build a company rooted in integrity, precision, and customer satisfaction. Their son, Bert Boliek, joined the family business early on, working from part-time high school employee to general manager by 2000. Under

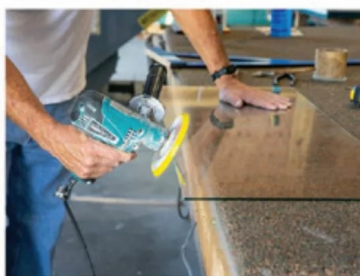
his leadership, the company has expanded while maintaining its commitment to excellence.

Today, Lake Glass & Mirror remains a trusted name in the glass, mirror, and installation industry. With a team of over 40 skilled professionals, the company continues to serve homeowners, contractors, and business owners with the same dedication that has defined it for generations.

Quality Craftsmanship for Every Space

Lake Glass & Mirror is a full-service glass and glazing company providing custom solutions for both residential and commercial clients, including:

- Shower enclosures
- Mirrors
- Glass tabletops
- Replacement window & door glass
- Glass handrails
- Storefronts & Entrances
- Curtainwalls
- Specialty & decorative glass



"We specialize in enhancing homes with high-quality glass solutions," says Bert. "From replacing window glass to upgrading shower enclosures, every project is tailored to our client's unique needs."

Andrew Karner, residential department director, emphasizes the company's custom approach. "Nothing we do is standard or off the shelf. Every piece is made to order, ensuring a precise fit and flawless finish. Our process includes in-home measurements and computer-generated final design images, so customers know exactly what to expect."

Lake Glass & Mirror's showroom offers hands-on experience, allowing clients to explore styles, finishes, and hardware options before deciding. Every detail is carefully considered, whether it's a sleek, frameless shower door or an elegant mirror upgrade.

Service That Sets Us Apart

At Lake Glass & Mirror, customer relationships are built on trust, expertise, and meticulous attention to detail.

"What sets us apart is our people," says Bert. "Glass is glass, and metal is metal, but our team's professionalism, skill, and commitment to quality make all the difference. Our quality control process ensures that every piece we install has been thoroughly inspected and meets our high standards."

The team prioritizes clear communication and precision from initial consultation to final installation. Every project begins with a thorough site assessment, ensuring that environmental factors are accounted for, and the final product exceeds expectations.

A Commitment to Community

For the Boliek family, Leesburg isn't just a place of business—it's home. They have been actively engaged in the community for over a century, supporting local events and initiatives.

"We believe in giving back," says Bert. "Our team participates in local festivals, charity cook-offs, and service projects. Whether it's the Leesburg Center for the Arts or community service clubs, we are intentional about making a positive impact."

Pedal for Paws: Making a Difference

One of the company's most cherished initiatives is Pedal for Paws, an annual charity bike ride benefiting the Humane Society of Lake County.

Founded in memory of Bert's sister, Nandi, the event combines a love for nature and outdoor activity with a passion for animal welfare.

"This event honors my sister's memory while raising funds to support rescue animals," says Bert. "It's about making a tangible difference in the lives of pets and families."

Held at the renowned Santos Trailhead in Ocala, the 16-mile ride welcomes cyclists of all skill levels. The \$40 entry fee includes an event T-shirt, refreshments, and a post-ride gathering with food and drinks. All proceeds benefit the Humane Society of Lake County, with Lake Glass & Mirror matching up to \$10,000 in donations.

"In 2024, Pedal for Paws raised nearly \$5,000, and we're aiming even higher this year," says Angie Klein, executive director of the Humane Society of Lake County. "It's a fun event that helps us continue our mission of finding forever homes for animals in need."

Looking Ahead

With a steadfast dedication to quality, service, and community, Lake Glass & Mirror continues to build on its reputation as a trusted leader in the glass industry.

For those seeking expert craftsmanship and timeless service, Lake Glass & Mirror remains the clear choice.



3411 W Main St, Leesburg / 352.787.4700 / lakeglassandmirror.com

ask the expert



Get the inside scoop on home perfection with **Style's** expert lineup, your go-to for savvy advice and informed choices.

PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Q&A →

Countertops



expert:

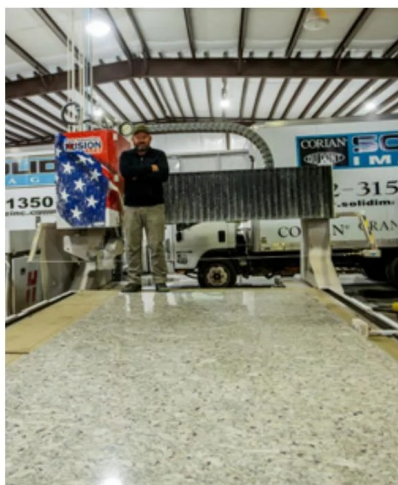
RICK PITTS

Co-owner, operations
manager of Solid Image

The locally owned countertop company founded by Mark Schroeder, Rick Pitts, and Karen Schroeder in 1998. Solid Image manufactures and installs countertops for new home construction, remodeling and commercial projects in Lake, Sumter and Marion counties.

SOLID IMAGE, INC.

31569 Progress Road, Leesburg
352.315.1350
solidimageinc.com



Q: What is the process once a customer makes their countertop selection?

A: During the sales process, the customer selects the countertop material and color. A popular choice is quartz, which is a man-made product manufactured to resemble natural stone.

The first step is to get the template of the customer's countertops. Our template technician uses a tablet and laser to record the exact dimensions. This is very accurate and works with the technology of our machinery to cut the countertops. Once we have the digital files, we photograph the customer's slabs—whether quartz or granite—and enter the template into the program, which allows us to locate and match up the seams and veining patterns. This process also allows us to involve the customer by emailing the countertop layout. Customers really enjoy having input on how their countertops will be cut.

Q: What machines are used in fabrication?

A: We use a sawjet, Fusion by Park Industries, which is a combination of a bridge saw and waterjet that is controlled by a computer. The bridge saw arm of the Fusion makes all the straight cuts and the waterjet cuts all the sink cutouts and curves. This is all computerized—push a button and the sawjet goes to work.



Q: How are seams and edges handled?

Seams are determined by the size of the countertop and the size of the selected slabs. Seams are visible but by using a color-matched epoxy, they are artistically blended on site for a professional finish.

Edges are finished using an in-line edge polisher. Our fabricators go over every inch of the countertop and make sure everything lines up as it should. All fabrication is completed at the shop, so there's no grinding or polishing at the customer's home.

At Solid Image, we handle all your countertop needs with custom fabrication and true customer service.

**SOLID
I M A G E**

Home Preservation



Q: What tools are essential for DIY home preservation jobs?

A: Taking care of your home doesn't have to be overwhelming or expensive. With the right tools and guidance, you can handle many home preservation projects yourself, saving time and money. At Carter's Ace Hardware, we're here to help with expert advice and top-quality products to ensure your DIY projects are a success. The most important thing to remember is: Don't overthink it, just come in and let us give you a hand!

Q: Any tips or advice for getting started on a project?

A: Taking care of your yard and garden doesn't have to be difficult—you just need the right tools. Whether maintaining your lawn, fertilizing, or working on irrigation, we offer everything you need, from garden hoses and sprinklers to mulch and weed control. We also carry small engine tools for trimmers, blowers, and chainsaws from trusted brands like Stihl and Toro. Our helpful staff is here to answer any questions you may have.

If looking to refresh your home with a new coat of paint, we've got you covered. In our full-service studio, we specialize in color matching, and carry a wide range of brushes, rollers, tapes, and caulking to make your tasks easy and enjoyable. Whether it's a touch-up or a more extensive job, we're here to guide you.

Plumbing issues are common for homeowners and can be solved without calling a pro. From running toilets to leaky faucets, we offer the tools and expertise to help. Bring in pictures of your project, and our experts will assist in choosing the necessary components.

For electrical tasks, whether it's changing light bulbs, replacing

outlets, or installing floodlights, we have the parts you need. With fuses, switches, and other essentials, our knowledgeable staff is ready to help, ensuring safe, correct completion.

No home project is complete without a well-stocked toolbox. We offer the largest selection of fasteners, nuts, bolts, anchors, screws and hard-to-find widgets available anywhere. Let us help you find the exact item you need for your project.

We also carry a variety of power tools from top brands like Craftsman, DeWalt, Milwaukee and Black & Decker so you can complete your project with ease. Make sure to check with us first next time you need one.

No matter what your home project entails, we are here to help. Our stores are all locally owned and have been family-operated since 1964. Everyone on staff lives in and cares about the community so turning to us for help is literally like getting help from your neighbor.



expert:

ZACH CARTER

Chief Merchandising Officer
at Carter's Ace Hardware



CARTER'S ACE HARDWARE

352.383.2101
cartersacehardware.com

Tavares - N. Eustis - Eustis
Umatilla - Mt. Dora - S. Leesburg
Sorrento - Apopka - Beverly Hills
Crystal River - Hunt Club

Carter's Ace Hardware voted "Best of the Best" by Lake and Sumter Style readers since 2019.



Roofing



expert:

TYLER SCOTT

Chief Operating Officer of
Scott's Roofing

A third-generation family-owned and operated business. Scott's Roofing opened in 1973 and is the oldest family-owned company in Lake County.



SCOTT'S ROOFING
15049 Old US Hwy 441, Tavares
352.343.7788
tscottroofing.com



Q: How do I know if my roof needs to be repaired or replaced?

A: A new roof is an investment, so people tend to put it off as long as possible. But how long can you wait?

Tyler Scott routinely inspects roofs to determine whether they can be repaired or if replacement is needed.

The following signs that indicate a roof should be replaced:

- Edges of shingles are curling; tabs appear cupped
- Cracked shingles

- Bald spots
- Excessive granules visible on driveway or in gutters after rain
- Dark streaks
- Moss
- Age of roof

In Florida, 20 years is the average lifespan for a shingle roof. Many insurance companies want them younger before they'll write or renew policies.

Q: What if I don't see obvious problems?

A: Scott's Roofing is happy to come out and do an evaluation.

"If your roof is older but still in good shape and there are no issues, we can do a yearly inspection to keep an eye on it," says Tyler.

Routine preventative maintenance is important to get the longest life out of a shingle roof. This includes:

- Blow off leaves and debris regularly
- Soft wash to keep roof free of mold and mildew

"We're one of the only companies in the area that still does repair work," says Tyler. "If we come do the inspection and you're just missing a tab or

shingle here and there, but the overall roof is in good shape, we can just do a repair. We're more than happy to do a repair when we can, but there is a point where it's diminishing returns to keep repairing a roof that's already failing."

He points out that the goal is always to repair or replace a roof before you're dealing with leaks.

When a new roof is called for, don't be overwhelmed by the cost of the project. Scott's Roofing offers in-house financing to make it do-able.

A Florida-licensed roofing contractor, Scott's Roofing is an Owens Corning platinum dealer and offers one of the best warranties in the industry—a 50-year system Preferred Protection warranty on Owens Corning® Roofing.

If you have any concerns that your roof may need repair or replacement, call today. Inspections are free and can typically be scheduled within days.

Home Restoration



Q: When I am dealing with an insurance claim situation, why do I need to sign an agreement with your company before you give an estimate for repairs?

A: Handling an insurance claim isn't something most people do every day, that's why having the right team on your side is crucial. We understand the complexities of working with insurance companies and can guide you through the claim process. We require a signed agreement because creating a thorough, accurate estimate takes time, expertise, and resources. Our estimates detail the work needed to restore

your property the right way. Our agreement ensures we can advocate for you, follow up on the claim, and even assist with your mortgage company if needed. It confirms that we are your contractor for the job, allowing us to move forward efficiently and fight for the repairs you deserve. Our goal is to make this process as smooth as possible while ensuring your home is restored the right way the first time.



expert:

COREY LANCE

CEO of CSL Construction

A licensed general contractor specializing in insurance claim repairs, fire and water damage reconstruction. The family-owned and operated company also does bathroom and kitchen remodels.

Q: What is the process when a home has sustained water damage?

A: Water damage restoration happens in two main steps. First is "mitigation," which is time-sensitive and considered an emergency to prevent further damage. Quick action is crucial to avoid mold and bigger issues. We remove unsalvageable materials like drywall and flooring, then completely dry out the structure. The next step is "reconstruction," where we restore everything, including flooring, drywall, cabinetry—bringing your home back to "pre-loss condition," as if nothing ever happened. The timeline for this phase depends on the insurance company, but we work to get things done as quickly as possible. We handle both steps, ensuring your home is properly restored without shortcuts.

Q: What if the insurance carrier denies the claim?

A: We deal with insurance companies daily and know how to advocate for you. We work for homeowners and know the right steps to take when issues arise. I've even testified as an expert witness in multiple trials on behalf of homeowners dealing with a claim. If your claim is denied, we can help request a re-inspection with a senior adjuster. We can recommend asking your insurance company for written documentation explaining the denial based on your coverage. This ensures clarity and helps us guide you through the next steps. Our commitment to homeowners and quality work are why we have 5-star Google reviews.



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cslgc.com

Kitchen & Bath



expert:

STAN SIWEK

Owner/operator of Premier Kitchens and Baths with partner Dudley Harrod

With over four decades of experience in the renovation industry, the company specializes in kitchen and bathroom remodels with tub-to-shower renovations being very popular.



PREMIER KITCHENS AND BATHS

2468 Hwy 441 Suite 501,
Fruitland Park
352.901.0454
premierkitchensandbaths.com

Q: What is the difference between an update and a full renovation?

A: An update follows the original floor plan and is generally completed in just a few days. Quotes for updates are usually given on the day of initial inspection. A renovation is more involved because it includes changes to the layout. An example is changing a galley kitchen to open concept, which requires moving the location of refrigerators, ovens and sinks. A bathroom renovation could be opening an enclosed shower to Roman style, which changes the bathroom layout. Renovations normally involve new flooring, drywall, texture, paint, and moving or adding electrical and plumbing. A full renovation typically requires a cad design and in some cases, permitting.

Q: How long will it take to complete?

A: Kitchen cabinets, tub-to-shower conversions and shower updates take 3 to 5 days. Full bathroom or kitchen renovations take 1 to 3 weeks.

Q: When should I update my shower?

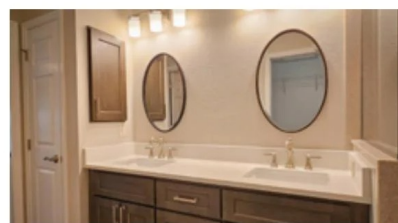
A: Don't wait until the tiles are popping off the walls. Missing grout and drywall damage due to water leakage are all signs an update is needed. A common mistake as we age is waiting too long to make your shower handicap accessible for yourself and loved ones. Get rid of tubs and high step-over curbs. Add shower seating and grab bars.

Q: What will it cost?

A: It's important for the homeowner to have a budget. Know your maximum spending limit and be honest. It's okay to have a dream price. Companies like ours want to please their clients first and should be honest and upfront on all costs. Estimates are not generally given over the phone until the project can be seen and measured. Not all materials have the same durability and warranty, so make sure you're comparing apples to apples when receiving bids from contractors.

Q: Do you give Veteran discounts?

A: Yes, we offer a 5 percent discount. We also encourage veterans to check with the VA. The HISA grant is available for those who qualify based on the level of disability and it doesn't have to be combat related. This grant provides up to \$6,800 towards a low-step shower.



Swimming Pools



Q: What are the health benefits of swimming or exercising in the water?

A: Swimming is a fantastic low-impact exercise that benefits people with arthritis, back pain, and joint issues. Unlike high-impact activities like running, swimming is much easier on the joints and spine, allowing for a longer and more comfortable workout. Many individuals, including those who are handicapped, use swimming as a form of physical therapy.

Water workouts also allow people with back issues to tread water or use pool exercise accessories such as underwater treadmills, which help them build strength with less strain and pain. Beyond the physical benefits, swimming also promotes mental wellness. Being in the water has a calming effect, reducing stress and promoting relaxation. Plus, swimming pools create a great environment for socializing, offering opportunities to meet and connect with others.

Q: How does Wiseman Pools cater to health-focused swimmers?

A: At Wiseman Pools, we specialize in building pools that cater to our clients' unique needs, including those designed specifically for exercise and therapy. We've constructed pools for individuals who use them for rehabilitation, as well as pools with features like smooth-current swimming for continuous exercise.

As a small, family-owned business, we take pride in providing custom pool designs rather than cookie-cutter solutions. We work closely with our clients to ensure their pool fits their lifestyle and health goals. Customer service and quality craftsmanship are at the core of what we do, and we're committed to delivering pools that enhance both physical well-being and overall enjoyment.



expert:

SHAWN WISEMAN
Owner of Wiseman Pools



WISEMAN POOLS

1517 W Main St., Leesburg
352.431.3766
wisemanpools.com



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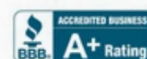
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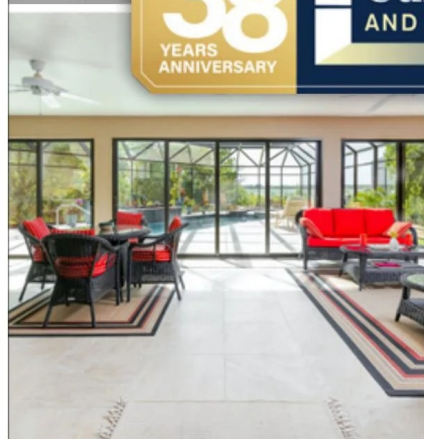
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ROOFING

BEHIND THE ROOF

The Skilled Craftsmen Who Make Eustis Roofing a Local Legend

For over 65 years, Eustis Roofing has been a trusted name in our community, providing top-quality roofing services. Jason Reisman's straightforward, cell phone-shot videos have helped elevate the company, but the real story lies in the skilled craftsmen behind the scenes. These dedicated professionals uphold our core values of quality, reliability, and expertise, working tirelessly in extreme conditions to ensure every roof is perfect.

Eustis Roofing thrives by blending old-school craftsmanship with modern technology. Jason has integrated cutting-edge tools with traditional skills passed down through generations to take the company to new heights.

With over 200 employees, many with 15+ years of experience, Eustis Roofing is a team-driven company. Richard Reisman, with over 30 years of leadership, combines classic techniques with innovative technology to guide field operations. His sons, Chase and Josiah, continue his legacy, with Chase leading the repair team and Josiah overseeing sales. Alex, another experienced leader with 15 years at Eustis, ensures quality by mentoring his team and overseeing job

installations. Xair, with 13 years in repairs, provides invaluable expertise and training to fellow team members.

Big Jose, with 15 years of experience, leads on complex jobs, guiding teams through challenges. Freddy, a master of tough projects for over 13 years, excels in creative solutions. Manny, with 15 years of experience, handles custom fabrication to ensure flawless execution, while Carlos, leading re-roofing teams for 13 years, upholds our quality standards and trains new employees.

Though Jason is the public face, it's the dedicated team of craftsmen, like Richard, Alex, Xair, Jose, Freddy, Manny, and Carlos, who truly make Eustis Roofing exceptional. Together, they share the mission of saving homeowners from bad roofers. At Eustis Roofing, we're not just about being the best roofing company—we're home to the best people, committed to quality and excellence.

The quality of a roof lies in the hands of the installer, and that's why Eustis Roofing continues to lead the industry.



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2019-2022

AGENDA

EVENTS
TRAVEL
PEOPLE

LOCAL TALENT

Step into the world of Gypsy Sparrow, where love, life and nostalgia fuel his soulful melodies.

85a





THE TO-DO LIST

2025

mar:

MAR
13-17

FESTIVALS

Erin Go Bragh

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day in Lake & Sumter Counties!

→ March 13 & 14 @ 4-9pm / Lake Sumter Landing,
The Villages / thevillagesentertainment.com

March 14 & 15 / Shamrockin' Fest / Downtown
Leesburg / shamrockinfest.com

March 17 / McGrady's Pub / Sawgrass Grove
810 Marilee Pl., The Villages / 352.753.6606 / mcgradys.com

March 17 / McCracken's Irish Pub / 719 W Main St.,
Leesburg / 352.460.0659 / mccrackenspub.com

March 17 / Grace O'Malley's Public House / 2400 U.S. Hwy. 27
#101, Clermont / 352.227.3155 / graceomalleyspub.com

EVENT

TRIFECTA

Kick off the season at the 42nd Annual Great Clermont Triathlon, featuring an international distance triathlon along with aquabike, duathlon, sprint triathlon, relay teams and open water swim events. Participants enjoy finisher medals, colorful shirts and post-race food. Awards are given across categories, including top overall, masters, and division finishers. Don't miss the fun and camaraderie!

→ **Clermont Waterfront Park**
330 Third St., Clermont
352.394.1320
info@sommersports.com
All day event starts at 7:30am



MAR
9

EVENT

Hometown Tradition

Join the family fun at the Fruitland Park Day and BBQ Cook-off! Enjoy food trucks, vendors, bounce houses, photo booths, laser tag and more. The parade kicks off at 10am, and parade entry is free, so register by March 16. The sweet aroma of local BBQ will stir the senses for this much-anticipated, all-day event.

→ **Fruitland Park Community Center** / 205 W. Berckman St., Fruitland Park
352.360.6734 / myoder@fruitlandpark.org / 10am-3pm.

MAR
29



mar. ON STAGE

Enjoy quality entertainment on the many stages of Lake and Sumter counties.

TITANIC UNDERTAKING 3/21-4/6

The musical play Titanic examines the causes, conditions and characters involved in this fascinating drama. This production is based on author Peter Stone's factual story of the ship's officers, crew and passengers. This legendary luxury liner serves not just as the background but as the central character. Music and lyrics by Maury Yeston and produced in arrangement with Concord Theatricals.

Melon Patch Theatre
311 N 13th St., Leesburg
melonpatchplayers.org
352.787.3013



WHO'S ADVENTURE? 3/21-4/6

Seussical the Musical is a fantastical, magical musical extravaganza that brings beloved Dr. Seuss characters to life, including Horton the Elephant, The Cat in the Hat, Gertrude McFuzz and Jojo, a boy with a big imagination. Transporting audiences from the Jungle of Nool to the invisible world of the Whos, the story follows Horton as he protects the Whos and an abandoned egg, facing ridicule, danger, and trials and highlights his journey with friendship, loyalty, and community.

Eustis State Theatre / Bay Street Players
109 North Bay St., Eustis / 352.357.7777
info@baystreetplayers.org

ONGOING EVENTS Events are subject to change and cancellation.

EVERY SUN	EVERY SUN	EVERY MON	EVERY TUE	EVERY FRI	1ST SAT	1ST FRI
Clermont Farmers Market 9am-2pm Downtown Clermont	Downtown Mount Dora Village Market 9am-2pm Mount Dora	Sumter County Farmers Market 6am-2pm 524 N. Market Blvd., Webster	Lady Lake Farmers Market 9am-2pm 250 Rolling Acres Rd., Lady Lake	Groveland Farmers Market 9am-1pm Lake David Park, Groveland	Brown's Junk in the Trunk 7:30am-1pm 13940 US 301, Oxford	Eustis First Friday 6-9pm Downtown Eustis





mar: JAMS

Move to the beat of your favorite performers at these great concerts or local venues!

3/3 @ 7pm

**THE PHIL COLLINS
EXPERIMENT**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/5 @ 7pm

ERIC JOHANSON

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/7 @ 7pm

**MICHAEL ANDREW
& SWINGERHEAD**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/8 @ 2:30 & 7pm

DIAMOND RIO

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/8 @ 7pm

**STAYIN' ALIVE: ONE
NIGHT OF THE BEE GEES**

*Clermont Performing Arts
Center, Clermont*

3/9 @ 4 & 7pm

**THE BEACH BOYS:
ENDLESS SUMMER GOLD**

The Tracy, Middleton

3/9 @ 2:30 & 7pm

**BRASS TRANSIT: THE
MUSICAL LEGACY
OF CHICAGO**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/9 @ 7pm

**THE VILLAGES
PHILHARMONIC**

The Sharon, The Villages

3/11 @ 7pm

JEFFERSON STARSHIP

The Tracy, Middleton

3/11-12 @ 7pm

**HOTEL CALIFORNIA: A
SALUTE TO THE EAGLES**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/13 @ 2:30pm

**HOTEL CALIFORNIA: A
SALUTE TO THE EAGLES**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/14 @ 7pm

THE MALPASS BROTHERS

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/15 @ 7pm

**TUSK: THE CLASSIC
FLEETWOOD MAC TRIBUTE**

*Clermont Performing Arts
Center, Clermont*

3/15 @ 7pm

**JAZZ AT LINCOLN
CENTER PRESENTS: NEW
ORLEANS SONGBOOK**

The Sharon, The Villages

3/15 @ 2:30 & 7pm

THE BROTHERS DOOBIE

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/16 @ 2:30 & 7pm

**THE MUSIC OF
BROOKS & DUNN**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/18 @ 7pm

GET THE LED OUT

The Sharon, The Villages

3/21 @ 7pm

RIDERS IN THE SKY

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/22 @ 2:30 & 7pm

**A SALUTE TO TINA
TURNER STARRING
AVIS ELLIS**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale



3/22 @ 7pm

& 3/23 @ 2:30 & 7pm

HADESTOWN

The Sharon, The Villages

3/23 @ 2:30 & 7pm

RHONDA VINCENT

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/29 @ 2:30 & 7pm

**GARY PUCKETT &
THE UNION GAP**

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/29 @ 7pm

**W.W. DOUBLE D! A TRIBUTE
TO DOLLY PARTON**

The Sharon, The Villages

3/30 @ 2:30 & 7pm

JOHN DENVER TRIBUTE

Orange Blossom Opry, Weirsdale

3/30 @ 7pm

THREE DOG NIGHT

The Sharon, The Villages

EVENT

Forest Plump

Join Momma G Farms in Eustis for a free tour of their food forest. @

→ Momma G Farms / 36815 Leslye Ln., Eustis
mommagfarms.org / 407.591.0406 / 9am-2pm

Let us help you get the word out!

→ To have an event considered for the calendar, send a short text description along with a color photo (if available) 45 days in advance of event to:
calendar@akersmediagroup.com or Lake & Sumter Style Calendar,
P.O. Box 490088, Leesburg, FL 34749

MAR
15



ONGOING EVENTS Events are subject to change and cancellation.

EVERY THU

**Lake County Farmers
& Flea Market**
8am-noon
2101 N. CR 452,
Eustis

1ST FRI

**Clermont First
Friday Food Trucks**
5:30-9pm
685 W. Montrose
St., Clermont

2ND FRI

**Second Friday
Farmers Market**
5-9pm
Lake David Park,
Groveland

2ND SAT

Plaid in the Park
5-9pm
230 W. 4th Ave.,
Mount Dora

2ND SAT

**Main Street
Classic Car Show**
5-9pm
510 W. Main St.,
Leesburg

4TH SAT

**Eustis Classic
Car Cruise-In**
4-8pm
Downtown
Eustis



PEOPLE

Soul strings attached

Gypsy Sparrow's music soars with heartfelt stories of life, love and nostalgia.

STORY: ROXANNE BROWN × PHOTO: MATTHEW GAULIN

Mark Smythe, better known locally as Gypsy Sparrow, was destined to create music as he grew up immersed in sound in the vibrant heart of New Orleans. As an only child at the time, Mark often accompanied his mother, a single mom, to the city's jazz clubs, where her voice captivated audiences and sparked his passion for performing.

"She always told me how I'd sit in the booth at these jazz clubs, holding her hairbrush, rocking back and forth and singing along with her," Mark says. "I think I imprinted on what was modeled in front of me."

Those memories and others inspire him to this day. When people ask how long he's been performing, Mark often recalls a picture from when he was 3, happily dancing on the French Quarter streets as musicians played around him. His mom put a hat out and passersby dropped enough change in it for bird seed to feed the pigeons and ice cream for the two of them.

He's also written a song about strolling atop a levee, singing 'American Pie' with his mom and one based on her lyric: "I love the rain down on the Old French Quarter."

"It's basically the only line I remembered from the hundreds of lyrics and melodies she wrote," he says.

Today, Mark channels that passion as a DJ, wedding singer, guitar player and songwriter. When he's not serenading newlyweds, he's hosting music bingo or performing at various bars across Central Florida, including Lake and Sumter counties. On Tuesday nights, he performs at Marmaduke's Lodge in Leesburg.

His songwriting captures both the beauty, sadness and spirituality of life, with lyrics about his childhood, his mother's enduring influence, the love he has for his children and his wife, Lindsey, whom he calls his best friend.

While Mark enjoys performing a wide variety of covers/genres, singing his own music blends real-life stories with emotion, creating a soulful, nostalgic and deeply personal sound.

"With other people's music, you can only interpret feelings of what the lyrics mean to you without really knowing exactly where they came from," Mark says, explaining that "the filter's gone" when he sings songs he's written.

"It's straight from my heart," he says. "It's like letting people inside my soul and showing them what every word means to me."

This month, Mark will release his debut album, *The Purple Blues*, named for

his late mother's unrealized dream of forming a band with that name. Mark brings his story full circle on the album—paying tribute to his mother's vision while forging his own legacy as an artist.

"I feel like this is really what I was built to do," he says. @



SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE INFO ON GYPSY SPARROW'S MUSIC, PERFORMANCES AND ALBUM RELEASE.



Know of a talented person in our community? → Email their story to roxanne@akersmediagroup.com.



ROXANNE BROWN



Officers U. Duvi, E. Bell & R. Corbett



Chad Cloud & Randy Cloud



Kathleen & Kent Holt



Vanessa Delgado & Family



Lynette Suarez, Heather New,
Toni & Pat Caracciolo



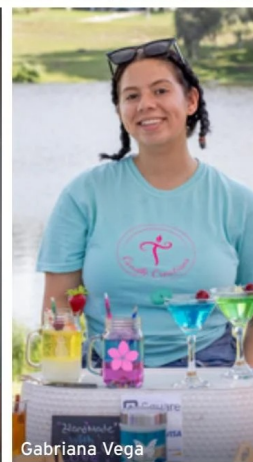
Tomas Ruiz & Bruwilea Lopez



Leslie Fletcher



Ezequiel Derickson & Moises Quiros



Gabriana Vega



DJ Sammy

CHEERS AND CHA-CHA-CHA

@ CLERMONT × PHOTOS: MATTHEW GAULIN

The 6th Annual Sips & Salsa Festival was held on Saturday, September 21, 2024, at Waterfront Park in Clermont. The much-anticipated free event sponsored by the South Lake Chamber of Commerce and the City of Clermont offered all things SALSA! Attendees enjoyed a variety of exquisite cultural cuisine prepared by local restaurants and community members. Party-goers danced to live salsa music and Latin DJs. There were also numerous activities for the entire family, including Fido's Fiesta Costume Contest, races, and much more. @



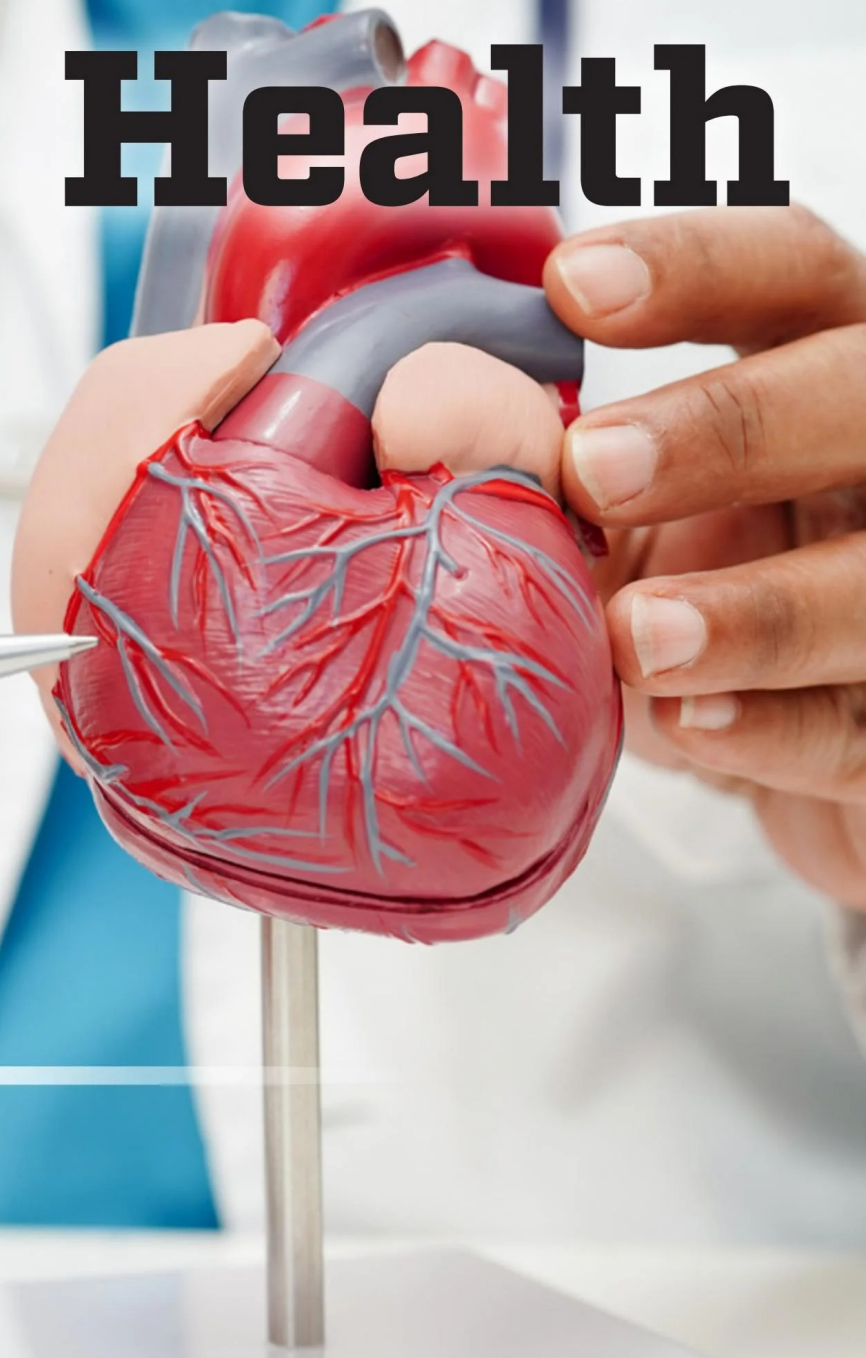
Jose Davila Sr., Jose Davila Jr. & Margarita Colon

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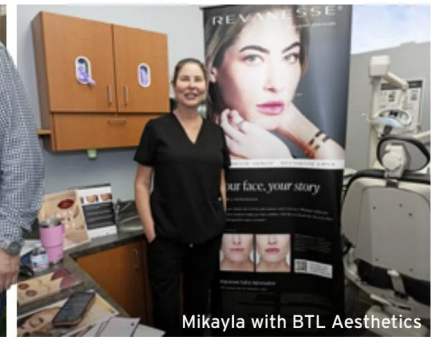




Lori Williams & Kelly Monroe



Shazad Dhanani, Yasmin Dhanani, Dr. Shireen Dhanani & Waseem Ansari



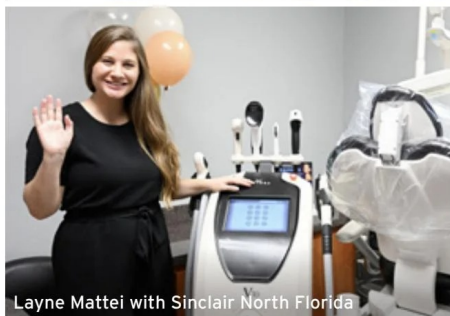
Mikayla with BTL Aesthetics



My Dental Touch Product Reps



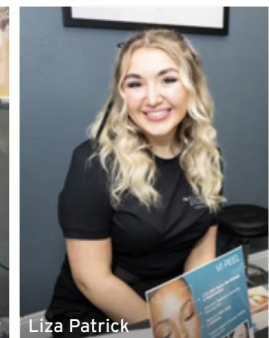
My Dental Touch Team



Layne Mattei with Sinclair North Florida



Celenia Rivera, Kimberly Scott & Latoya Chester



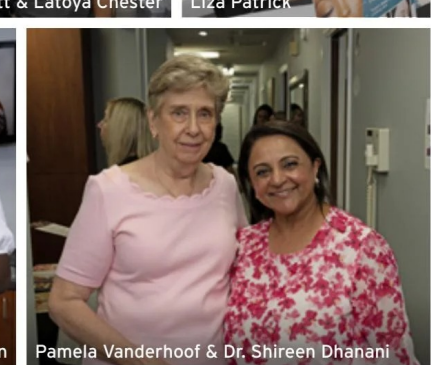
Liza Patrick



Taryn Lang & Bailey Bohrer



Barbie Morgan & Yolanda Green



Pamela Vanderhooft & Dr. Shireen Dhanani

ALL SMILES

@ LEESBURG × PHOTOS: CINDY PETERSON

My Dental Touch celebrated 20 years of serving their patients with passion by introducing My Wellness Studio and Medical Spa last November 7 for an all-day event that showcased new treatments and procedures from the beloved Dr. Dhanani and team. Guests enjoyed live treatment demonstrations, exclusive event savings, prizes, educational sessions and more. Many who attended have been patients of Dr. Dhanani and My Dental Touch for years and were thrilled to learn about starting their personal wellness journey with this new offering. To learn more about the new treatments and wellness studio, go to mywellnessstudio.com. @

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Brad Weber & John Temple



Paul Johns, Jennifer Grafton, Lance Sewell, Hank Bolduc & Kathy Judkins



Dina Sweatt & Richard Skyzinski



Donna Kirtland & Heather Hall



Ray Villegas, George Asbate & Monty Fletcher III

Scan this code to view all photos on lakeandsumterstyle.com.



LEADING THE WAY

@ MONTVERDE × PHOTOS: ROXANNE BROWN

The LEAD Annual Dinner to celebrate a successful year in local and regional economic development was held September 25, 2024, at Bella Collina in beautiful Montverde. Lake Economic Area Development Partnership & Business Creation representatives shared insights for the coming year and welcomed keynote speaker, Amazon Economic Development Manager Sam Blatt. @

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& Replacement



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Surgery



Trauma &
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Medicine

LOCATIONS

Leesburg

701 Medical Plaza Drive
Leesburg, FL 34748

Spanish Springs

1501 U.S. Highway 441
Building 1800, Suite 1832
The Villages, FL 32159

Tavares

2051 Mayo Drive
Tavares, FL 32778

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STUDENTS

COACHES

TEAMS

ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT

Leesburg High wrestler
Jeremy Lacey is on fire,
pinning down victories
and chasing even
greater success.

96CS





PEOPLE

PAYTON PARKES

Covering all the bases: from home runs to homemade goods and high achievements.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

Lake-Sumter State College (LSSC) sophomore softballer Payton Parkes has found her stride and is making an impact academically and athletically. Payton, a South Lake High School graduate, chose LSSC to stay close to her Groveland roots, citing her connection to head softball coach Jay Miller as a key factor in her decision.

"I went to his camps and loved how he treated everyone like family," Payton says. "He's so down-to-earth and a big reason I am here."

Although she considered herself a decent hitter in high school, Payton says her batting truly improved at the collegiate level. Last season, she posted a .384 batting average, knocked out nine home runs and maintained a notable .944 fielding percentage, making her one of LSSC's standout performers her freshman year.

Those numbers and a 3.5 GPA helped earn

Payton a spot on the 2023-'24 National Junior College Athletic Association All-Academic Team, an honor she describes as "surreal."

"I never imagined achieving something like that," she says. "It's an incredible honor."

Athletics run in the Parkes family. Payton's father played football at South Lake High. Her mother, Roberta, who

played softball for Apopka High, introduced Payton to the sport.

Payton also attributes her pursuit of a business degree to Roberta, a successful businesswoman who works at a Tiffany's jewelry store.

In addition to her softball commitments, Payton runs a small baking business selling goods to local hair salons, friends and businesses in the area. Her endeavor was inspired by her late grandmother, Pat, who encouraged her to explore her passion for baking.

"THE FASTEST PATH ISN'T ALWAYS THE BEST."

Payton hopes to continue playing softball at a four-year college after this season, though she is still considering her options.

Her advice for aspiring athletes is to be patient and trust the process.

"The fastest path isn't always the best," she says. "That's the beauty of playing at LSSC. Not all of us were heavily recruited out of high school and that's perfectly fine because slow and steady wins the race."

Payton also praised the support and resources at LSSC, emphasizing the camaraderie among teammates.

"Most of us are in the same classes and that's such a big benefit," she says. "If one of us is finding a class challenging, we are all there for one another. Just like a team on the field, we are also a team in the classroom." 

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PEOPLE

JEREMY LACEY

Leesburg High student has tasted success—and he's hungry for more.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA × PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL AND PROVIDED

Jeremy Lacey knew he belonged the moment he entered the Leesburg High School (LHS) weight room. “From the start, it felt like home,” Jeremy recalls. “Everyone was in their zone, pushing each other to be better. That sense of camaraderie is what Coach (Josh) Boyer has built here, and it’s why Leesburg consistently competes at the highest level.”

Jeremy knows about top-notch competition. He’s the 2024 state weightlifting champion in the traditional 119-pound class.

He’s come a long way since stepping into the electric atmosphere of the LHS weightlifting program as a sophomore. It didn’t take long for Jeremy to feel he belonged to the brotherhood created by Coach Boyer’s leadership.

“Coach Boyer has created a once-in-a-lifetime program,” teammate Savion Latimore says. “We owe so much of our success to his vision and the way he pushes us to be our best.”

Inspired by Savion, Jeremy has enjoyed a meteoric rise.

His success is rooted in discipline, a supportive network and a deep appreciation for his family’s influence, particularly his parents and Uncle Joseph.

“My parents are my foundation,” Jeremy says. “They’ve sacrificed so

much for me, and they’re my biggest fans. My dad is always in my corner, and my mom helps me fuel my body the right way.”

His father, Jeremy Lacey, Sr., played a pivotal role by instilling a tireless work ethic and providing guidance at their home gym. His mother, Tiffany Lacey, serves as his personal dietitian and ensures he maintains a balanced and natural diet with home-grown food from his grandfather’s farm.



"The natural, farm-grown food I've had access to makes a huge difference," Jeremy says. "People often ask how I stay in shape, and it's about keeping things natural and simple."

Winning the state championship last year only fueled Jeremy's hunger for more. He's set his sights on breaking the 119-lb. state bench press record, which has stood since 1998. For Jeremy, it's not just about personal accolades but also about setting the standard for his team and leaving a legacy for the future of the program.

"Standing on that podium with the state championship medal around my neck was humbling, but it also lit a fire," Jeremy reflects. "The journey doesn't stop here. I want to prove to myself and my teammates that hard work pays off."

Jeremy's achievements extend far beyond weightlifting. A product of a college-educated household, he has excelled academically with a 3.7 GPA and is committed to Florida Atlantic University (FAU), where he plans to study Political Science and Pre-Law.

He has no doubt that Leesburg High has prepared him for future success.

"Leesburg High is diverse, and that's a beautiful thing," Jeremy notes. "Coming from a strong household, I've been able to grow alongside classmates from all walks of life. It's shown me the resilience of people who face challenges I've never had to experience."

As an African American, Jeremy Lacey takes immense pride in defying stereotypes and representing his community with excellence. He credits his parents for fostering an environment that

promoted education, communication and a strong sense of self.

"My parents always emphasized education and communication, and it's made a huge difference in how I present myself," Jeremy shares.

At Leesburg High, he's embraced opportunities. For instance, he attended a rigorous American Legion academic session on law and government, where he impressed participants with his knowledge and poise.

"People often judge Title I schools or assume certain things about students from my background, but I'm proud to break those molds and show the world the intelligence, talent and determination that comes from Leesburg," Jeremy says.

Jeremy believes his ability to bridge different worlds by balancing his roots with a strong academic foundation makes him a leader in the gym as well as a voice for those often underestimated.

Jeremy says the most rewarding part of weightlifting isn't the individual accolades—it's the team bond.

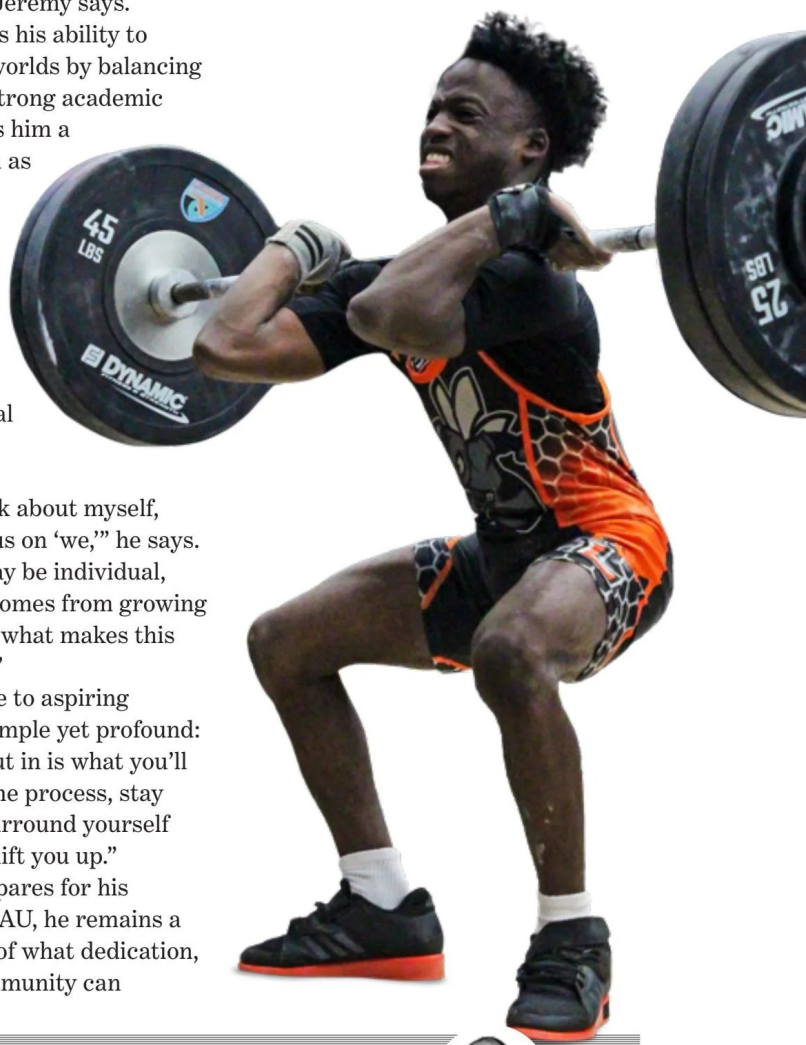
"It's easy to talk about myself, but I want to focus on 'we,'" he says. "Weightlifting may be individual, but our success comes from growing as a team. That's what makes this program special."

Jeremy's advice to aspiring weightlifters is simple yet profound: "The work you put in is what you'll get back. Trust the process, stay consistent and surround yourself with people who lift you up."

As Jeremy prepares for his next chapter at FAU, he remains a shining example of what dedication, humility and community can

achieve. Whether he's breaking records or inspiring others with his words, Jeremy Lacey is a champion in every sense of the word. 🏆

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KYLE COPPOLA



HEART *of a* Raider

A.J. Bryant's passion for coaching and community fuels South Sumter basketball.

STORY: KYLE COPPOLA × PHOTOS: MATTHEW GAULIN

South Sumter High School's red and white run deep in A.J. Bryant, who is one of the most recognizable people in and around Bushnell.

Bryant, who graduated in 2001, has spent the past 11 years as head basketball coach for the South Sumter Raiders, a program he led to greatness through trials and tribulations.

Bryant excelled in both basketball and football during his time at South Sumter, especially football. His talent on the gridiron earned him a scholarship to Georgia Southern University, where he had a successful college career.

Despite his achievements in football, basketball remained close to his heart.

"After I finished school, I came back to South Sumter because it was always home," Bryant says. "My parents and I had a ton of

family here, so if I was going to coach, it was only logical that it was going to be here."

Bryant started out coaching the girls' basketball team, which included his younger sister, Latasha Kennerson.

"She was a freshman the day I started, so I got to coach her," he shares.

Latasha had a record-setting career, scoring over 1,800 points. She remains South Sumter's all-time leading scorer.



Bryant later transitioned to boys' basketball. He initially served as an assistant coach under Gary Russo. When the head coaching position became available in 2014, he eagerly stepped into the role.

"It was something I truly wanted," he says. "There is nothing like getting to coach for your former school as an alumnus."

South Sumter High, with its old-school charm, holds a special place in Bryant's heart.

"It's great to see kids who start in our youth program stay with the programs," he notes. "We're an old school tight-knit community. While kids are quick to leave schools today, we know our kids 90% of the time are going to stay. Their parents and grandparents went to school here. It's amazing to have that kind of loyalty in a day when sports have become fairly disloyal."

This commitment to community encompasses so much. Bryant has invested his own time and resources to improve the program, even reupholstering team chairs with the South Sumter Raider logo. It's that kind of commitment and hometown feel that makes Bryant loved by so many in the community.

Bryant's influence isn't limited to basketball. As a teacher, he's deeply involved in his players' lives, both academically and personally.

"If they have problems, they call me," he says. "It's not just basketball; education is a whole other realm. I see a different side of them in the classroom and that makes for a unique environment, but I love it."

Unlike many programs where coaches are not employed at the school, South Sumter's coaches are deeply integrated into the educational structure, strengthening the small-town connection that Bryant cherishes.

Bryant's innovative spirit has propelled the program to new heights, even in the face of challenges. For nearly eight years, the high school team lacked access to a gym during the

summer, as the facility was given to the city for youth programs. To ensure his team's development, Bryant created the "Raider Road Show," a summer initiative where the team traveled across the Southeast, playing 62 games in June alone.

"It's not only helped us improve but strengthened the bonds of the players," he explains. "When football ends on Friday, we're off and rolling on Monday because we've already practiced together all summer."

Bryant even went so far as to obtain his Commercial Driver's License (CDL), so he'd be able to drive the team to games.

"It's just one of those things you do for the kids," he says with a sincere smile.

"THERE IS NOTHING LIKE GETTING TO COACH FOR YOUR FORMER SCHOOL AS AN ALUMNUS."

As a varsity boys coach, Bryant emphasizes grit and determination.

"I like to preach being a dog," he says. "I can teach the X's and O's, but you need the drive to dominate others. We're not always the most basketball-savvy team, but we're super athletic."

You've got to have some dog in you, and we get after it the way we know how."

Bryant's commitment to South Sumter extends beyond basketball. This year, he organized a community bike drive, distributing 20 bikes to local children.

"It's all about community efforts," Bryant says. "That's what South Sumter High is built upon. We have a motto here which is Tradition Never Graduates. It warms my heart to see so many people give back once they graduate from this school." 🐶



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MENU

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STREET EATS SPECIAL FEATURE

Smoked ribs, wings and signature pulled pork egg rolls make Uncle Kenny's Take-Away a flavor-packed hit!

102





STREET EATS=SPECIAL FEATURE

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STORY & PHOTOS: AKERS STAFF



From barbecue, potatoes, steak and gourmet tacos to coffee, decadent desserts and so much more, food trucks are the ultimate on-the-go dining experience — and not just in big cities.

Join us as we hit the streets to discover the numerous mobile kitchens that abound in Lake and Sumter Counties. Hope you're hungry, because you absolutely have to try three of our favorite trucks . . . and there's plenty of good eats at other food trucks we discovered along the way!

POTATO, POTATOE

No matter how you spell it, this spud truck puts the comfort in comfort food.

STORY: GINA HORAN
PHOTOS: NICOLE HAMEL

J.C. Mrosek moved from his native Puerto Rico in 2016 to seek new opportunities, a pursuit that took him through Orlando, Newport News, Virginia, New Orleans and Dallas in his effort to find a place that aligned with his lifestyle and professional goals.

Leesburg turned out to be the place where his craving struck.

"One evening my cousin Christian and I were talking about the loaded baked potatoes they loved back home in Puerto Rico," J.C. says. "We realized that there wasn't a single place that offered it, so we ended up going to the store, buying the ingredients and making them ourselves."



JC and Christian then hosted a dinner party for their cousins to get some honest feedback. The verdict was unanimous: The baked potatoes were a hit, and they needed to be shared with the world.

They decided to take a chance and quickly pooled their savings to buy a food truck that they wrapped with a custom designed logo bearing the name "Mr. Potatoe King."

"In Puerto Rico, we like to use slang and stretch words to make them sound cool or unique," J.C. explains. "That's why we decided to make the spelling of potato different, so it would stand out and start a conversation."

Once you taste the product, you won't be talking spelling; you'll be raving about the tasty toppings available for enormous potatoes that are literally the size of a small nerf football. Where they source the spuds, how they steam them and

why they stay so fresh is a closely-guarded secret.

Looking ahead, the cousins envision turning the Mr. Potatoe King food truck concept into a nationwide franchise empire ala Chick-fil-A success. For now, they are happy to craft their skills and cultivate a following at their Leesburg location. They also offer half-sized "Jr. Potatoes," loaded fries and wings.

MR. POTATOE KING

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FROM GRILL TO GO

Lake Tech grad's culinary passion fuels success for 'restaurant on wheels.'

STORY AND PHOTOS: CINDY PETERSON



"I USE ALL FRESH ANGUS PRIME BEEF—NO FROZEN PATTIES HERE!"

Mike Conover, owner of Steak Shack Bistro & Catering in Leesburg, has turned his lifelong love of cooking into a successful food truck business, or his restaurant on wheels as he likes to call it.

Mike's passion began in childhood when he cooked for his family.

"I don't know why, but cooking has always been my thing," he says. "By the time I was 13 or 14, I knew this is what I wanted to do."

Mike set his sights on owning a food truck after graduating from Umatilla High School, earning a culinary degree from Lake Tech in 2018 and enduring several setbacks.

"I saved every dollar I had, but the company I invested in to be my first food truck went out of business," he says. "All the money I had saved up was gone." Undeterred, Mike started again in 2023 with a small tent and grill

and eventually worked his way up to his current food truck.

Steak Shack Bistro & Catering sets itself apart by delivering restaurant-quality meals.

"I use all fresh Angus prime beef—no frozen patties here," Mike says. "Everything is fresh-cooked to order, like you'd get in a restaurant."

Mike offers mouthwatering options featuring fresh, high-quality ingredients and bold flavors. The fan-favorite Philly Cheesesteak headlines the menu, featuring shaved ribeye steak, grilled onions and peppers, melted white cheese, and a garlic Amoroso's roll. Other popular items include the prime Black Angus burger topped with smoked Gouda and the sirloin tips served over garlic mashed potatoes with brown gravy.

Rotating specials add variety, with highlights like the Mac n Tips bowl, the loaded Steak Poutine and the Chicken Bacon Ranch Philly Cheesesteak. Side dishes, including smoked Gouda mac and cheese, Creole French fries and garlic mashed potatoes perfectly complement the main dishes, delivering a hearty dining experience.

Mike's food truck also offers customizable menus for catering events.

"If you want chicken sandwiches or something unique for your event, I've got you," he says.

His adaptability was showcased when he created a Regency-era dinner menu during a recent Jane Austen festival.

"There are a hundred food trucks out there," he says. "I want people to choose me because they know they're getting fresh, high-quality food every time."

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ANY WAY YOU SLICE IT

Uncle Kenny's BBQ and Pizza make a double comeback in South Lake.

STORY: ROXANNE BROWN

PHOTOS: NICOLE HAMEL

For over a decade, Kenny Nadeau delighted the community at Uncle Kenny's BBQ and St. Louis Style Pizza near Clermont's Citrus Tower.

Known for award-winning barbecue and unique pizza creations, Uncle Kenny's became a local hotspot before closing in June 2022 due to skyrocketing operating costs and a depleted post-pandemic workforce.

But Kenny's passion for barbecue burned hotter than ever. When a friend loaned him a food truck, Kenny seized the opportunity and launched Uncle Kenny's Take-Away that November.

"I started out doing some catering, but when I saw that people were still looking for us in the community,

I decided to go the food truck route," Kenny says.

Uncle Kenny's Take-Away—with a menu totally independent of the restaurant's old menu—serves Kenny's most popular creations, including slow-cooked pulled pork, chopped brisket, Nashville hot & spicy chicken sandwiches, burnt ends and smoky ribs. He also features homemade barbecue sauces, baked beans, coleslaw and his signature pulled pork egg rolls, a fan favorite.

"We've brought back some of the classics everyone loves and added fun new menu items like mac and cheese and chicken tenders for the kids, all at reasonable prices," Kenny says.

Uncle Kenny's Take-Away sets up at Lowe's, Ford of Clermont, Toole's Ace Hardware, Kroger, First Friday Food Trucks in downtown Clermont, Pig on the Pond, the Lake County Fair and more.

KENNY'S HOMEMADE BBQ SAUCES CAN BE PURCHASED AT TOOLE'S ACE HARDWARE STORES, CHOICE MEATS & BILLY'S MEAT MARKET.



Head pitmaster Kenny and his competition team also participate in sanctioned BBQ competitions throughout Florida and across the country. A recent achievement was being named State Champion in Apalachicola's 2024 Butts and Clucks Cookoff on the Bay against 62 other teams.

And that's not all. Kenny opened a stationary food truck last month at The Patio at Ax-Caliber (524 West Avenue) in downtown Clermont.

With outdoor seating, live music, and Kenny's barbecue classics and St. Louis-style pizza, locals have plenty of reasons to stop by or use DoorDash for delivery.

"It's nice that so many people are excited to see that we're still around and supporting us," Kenny says.

Owning and operating a restaurant on wheels isn't without challenges, but seeing satisfied smiles through the food truck window motivates him to keep the smoker rolling.

UNCLE KENNY'S TAKE-AWAY

Follow Uncle Kenny's Take-Away on Facebook & Instagram for the weekly mobile schedule, which is posted every Monday or Tuesday. Private message Kenny with any questions or email him at knadeau@unclekennysbbq.com.





More Food Truck Options

**Food truck hours, menus and locations may change, and this list may not include every local option. Check with vendors for the latest updates, and let us know if we missed one of your favorites!*

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BEHIND THE BAR

PEOPLE

MOBILE UNIT

Wildwood couple brings joy, a jigger and the juice to local events.

STORY: GINA HORAN
PHOTO: NICOLE HAMEL

As far as bar gigs go, catering is easily my favorite. You show up, set up and clean up. Throw in a few obligatory smiles with minimal chit-chat and leave with your pockets full.

Erika and Chris McCausland, a married couple from

Wildwood, have taken that concept and hope to make it top shelf.

"We just wanted to work together somehow," Erika says. "After researching different ideas, we thought a mobile bar could be a great fit. Our love of people, good drinks, and great service inspired us."

Seeking to be closer to family, the duo relocated from Ohio in 2022. He is a veteran who works in private security and she is a nurse. Two young daughters round out their family. That is when they launched Barfly, a mobile bar service.

Operating under a "dry" bar model, Barfly handles every aspect of beverage service except supplying the alcohol. Erika and Chris bring the bar, mixers, supplies, ice, tools and even a collapsible, custom-made satellite

bar, giving them flexibility for events of all sizes.

"We're somewhere between hiring a person just to pour drinks and having a fully-catered bar," Chris explains. "It's a cost-effective solution, especially if the client only wants a few specific types of drinks."

They also use batching, which is a method of scaling individual cocktail recipes for large groups. Instead of making drinks one at a time, the bartender can prepare everything in advance so guests can enjoy themselves without waiting.

Though they initially expected weddings to be their bread and butter, they quickly discovered that residents of The Villages tend to celebrate a variety of events.

"We've done everything from anniversaries and retirements to birthdays and even driveway parties," Chris says.

For now, Barfly Mobile Bar remains a part-time venture.

"We're taking it one step at a time," Erika says. "We're young enough to build this over time, learn from our mistakes, and figure it out together. 🍷"



BOURBON BLISS

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 oz. bourbon
- 1/2 oz. orange juice
- 2 oz. cranberry juice

DIRECTIONS:

Pour over ice. Garnish with cranberries and/or orange slices.

TO BATCH (MAKES 10):

- 2 1/2 cups bourbon
- 5 oz. orange juice
- 2 1/2 cups cranberry

DIRECTIONS:

Serve over ice with garnish in a pitcher.



Have a favorite mixologist? → Email me at gina@akersmediagroup.com and tell us which bartender stirs your drinks.



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352.989.4403

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352.324.3910

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27405 U.S. HWY 27, LEESBURG | 352.728.2020 & 352.365.9004
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When hit with a craving for authentic New York style pizza, there's no need to catch the next flight to the Big Apple. Simply visit Brooklyn's Pizzeria & Italian Restaurant in Leesburg and Owners James and Shawna Pancari will make you feel right at home with New York inspired vibes, décor, and flavors. Not only have they perfected the New York style thin crust people swear by, but they take pride in ensuring everything they serve is made fresh and from-scratch daily; including their pizza dough and sauces, strombolis, calzones, subs, salads, wings, specialty Italian and pasta dinners. Additionally, the restaurant is family-run and Veteran-owned, with James having served in the Coast Guard for 31 years. In honor of that, the dining room features a military wall, plus a 10 percent discount for Veterans, active members of the military, police, fire, and first responders. Brooklyn's Pizzeria also offers gluten-free pizza and pasta options, and accepts DoorDash, online-ordering, catering, and curbside pickup.

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Guru Indian Restaurant

CLERMONT HILLSIDE TERRACE, 2400 S. U.S. 27, SUITE 101, CLERMONT
352.241.9884 | GURURESTAURANTCLERMONT.COM

Owned by Chef Uday Kadam, Guru has a following of fans who savor the delicious, award-winning Indian cuisine inside the restaurant's beautiful dining room filled with Indian décor and tables with linen tablecloths. Guru earned the prestigious Best Entrée award at the 2021 Taste of South Lake & Business Expo for its Chicken Tikka Masala, featuring boneless chicken pieces cooked in a Tandoor oven with tomato sauce, onion, aromatic herbs, spices, and served with Basmati rice. Guru also has tasty appetizers, Naan breads, vegan dishes, and a wide array of entrees, including Palak Paneer, a dish of homemade cubes of cheese cooked with spinach and fresh spices; Lamb Vindaloo of choice lamb cubes marinated in vinegar with potato and a blend of spices; and Tandoori Chicken Tikka, where the chicken is marinated in mild spices and yogurt. Additionally, Indian alcoholic beverages of Taj Mahal and Kingfisher are served at Guru, and the restaurant caters private functions, parties, and provides many delivery options for orders made online at mygurutogo.com.

Mon - Sat
11:30am - 10:00pm

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11:30am - 7:00pm



Kawachi Sushi & Bar

10601 US-441, SUITE C12, LEESBURG | 352.431.3449
KAWACHISUSHI.COM

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1690 CITRUS BLVD., LEESBURG | 352.323.1444 | LAPALMAGRILL.COM

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Rodello's Italian Restaurant

26736 U.S HIGHWAY 27, LEESBURG | 352.319.8093 | RODELLOS.COM

Chef Amadeo Avila invites you to enjoy authentic and fresh Italian cuisine in a friendly, comfortable dining environment at Rodello's Italian Restaurant. The recipes used for his dishes are a blend of old-school traditions from Italy—with new culinary inspirations that Chef Amadeo has learned during many years in the restaurant business. Flavorful, homemade Italian entrees such as Pistachio Crusted Lamb, Salmon Saltimbocca, Lobster Ravioli, Shrimp Risotto, and many others are classics and prepared with only the freshest ingredients. The lunch menu features personal pizzas, calzones, subs, and pasta. Sit in the spacious dining room or enjoy drinks or desserts like delicious gelato in the cozy lounge, which features a full bar, wine menu, and an array of specialty cocktails. Always look for new features on Chef Amadeo's menu, available on the restaurant's website, Rodellos.com.

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At La Palma Mexican Grill in Leesburg, every meal is a celebration of culture, tradition, and family. That's exactly what owners Ildelfonso Hernandez and his mother, Esperanza, want every guest to experience when they walk through the doors. Having grown up in the heart of the restaurant industry, Ildelfonso understands that Mexican food is more than just ingredients and flavors—it's about connection, warmth, and creating a place where people feel welcome.

"This is a restaurant where families can come together and feel at home," he says. "We pride ourselves on great service, a fun atmosphere, and, of course, incredible food." And incredible food is exactly what La Palma delivers.

The restaurant's newest menu additions have been a hit, with diners raving about the sizzling fajitas, the rich and flavorful pollo poblano, and the comforting, traditional chilaquiles.

But the real showstopper is the Molcajete, a feast designed for two that arrives in a steaming volcanic stone bowl, overflowing with strips of steak, chicken, shrimp, chorizo, nopal, and scallops, all topped with chili toreado. Seafood lovers are just as spoiled with dishes like Camarones a la Diabla and the Mojarra, a whole fried fish with a crispy, seasoned crust that gives way to tender, flavorful meat.

With room for 250 patrons, a lively bar, and outdoor seating, La Palma is the perfect spot for a fun night out, a relaxed lunch, or a quick bite of burritos and enchiladas. But for many, the bar steals the show. Ildelfonso has taken the margarita game to the next level, serving up his famous cocktails in Patrón bottles, with flavors like passion fruit, mango, wild berry, peach, and banana strawberry. He's also

created the signature La Palma Tower, featuring two margaritas topped with a baby Corona.

It's no surprise the cantina has become a local favorite, drawing in guests who come for the drinks but stay for the warm, festive atmosphere.

And when it comes to celebrations, La Palma knows how to throw a party. Whether it's Día de los Muertos, Cinco de Mayo, or Mexican Independence Day, the restaurant comes alive with music, food, and culture, turning every visit into an experience.

Ildelfonso hopes every guest walks away with a deeper appreciation for Mexican cuisine and heritage. "At La Palma," he says, "it's about sharing our family's recipes, welcoming friends and creating new traditions."



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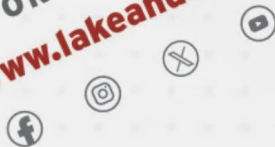
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2026 Teacher OF THE YEAR

.....

Lisa Bryant, the Lake County Schools' 2026 Teacher of the Year, proudly stands with her brand-new 2025 Volkswagen Tiguan gifted by Jenkins Automotive Group. A dedicated educator for 12 years, she has spent the last five working with ESE students ages 18 to 22 in a transition program focused on life and vocational skills. As co-chair of the ESE department at Lake Minneola High, Bryant is committed to empowering her students. "Her unwavering belief in every student's potential is what truly sets her apart," Principal William Roberts shared in his recommendation.



LISA BRYANT
LAKE MINNEOLA HIGH

ROOKIE TEACHERS OF THE YEAR FINALIST



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Simeon Hernandez
Lake Minneola High School



Alexis Lewis
South Lake High School

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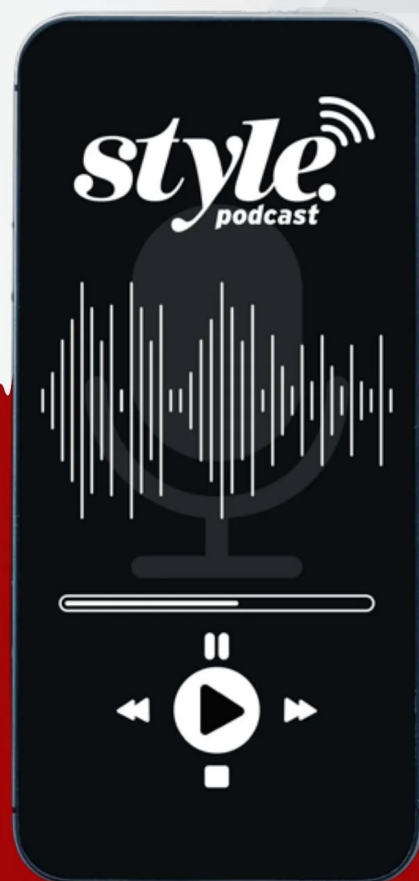
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Healthy living

A STYLE PODCAST



HOSTED BY

Gina Horan

Gina is a seasoned media professional who brings a wealth of experience and a dynamic perspective to The Healthy Living Podcast and the Style team. Passionate about connecting with local experts and sharing their insights, she engages Central Florida audiences with an educated and holistic approach to body, mind, spirit, and finance.



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Putting down the pint

Repurposing a beloved glass for a more purposeful life.

STORY: GINA HORAN

In March of 2024 I walked into McCracken's Irish Pub in Leesburg and downed my last drink. For dramatic flair, I chose to sip a pint of Guinness around St. Patrick's Day in an Irish pub. I had spent nearly four decades savoring that velvety stout from countless barstools in countless Irish pubs on countless St. Patrick's Days.

That was me for most of my adult life: have hip flask, will travel. Always the first to raise a glass and always ready to close down the club. Party girl, sorority sister, bartender, columnist, radio personality, and solo world traveler—booze was my constant companion, my bestie on each adventure and at every event. I even learned how to say “cheers” in a bunch of different languages.

A guy once asked me, “Why are you reading a book in a bar?” I clapped back, “Because libraries don't serve beer.”

As my 30s blurred into my 50s, the endless personal pub crawl became exhausting. I finally realized that while being a young “party girl” may have been fun, becoming a middle-aged boozier wasn't. At 57, I was over it.

So, last year, when **Style** publisher Kendra asked me to host The Healthy Living Podcast, I knew that was it. Call it vanity, but the idea of discussing life balance and wellness while secretly craving my next White Claw felt humiliating and hypocritical, which to me, was far worse than the most egregious hangover.

I also realized that moderation never felt like true freedom and “having just one” only kept me tethered to a habit I began to loathe. As I stare down the barrel of 60, I want to make the best of the life I have left.

It's been a year now, and while I haven't morphed into some Zen-like fitness guru, I'm free of hangovers, my finances are healthier and my mind is clear. I've still got the Guinness pint glass, but now it's repurposed for better things like nourishing office plants or showcasing roses from my mom's garden.

Most importantly, I've proven to myself that authenticity and not alcohol, is what truly connects me to the world. ☺

Hey, readers! Is there a particular subject that you would like me to write a commentary about? → Tell me, via email at gina@akersmediagroup.com.



GINA HORAN



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